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The only option

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak said yesterday that peace-making in the Middle East should continue, despite four bombings in Israel that killed 55 people during the past 10 days. "There is no other option," he said.

In his first public reaction to the bombings, reports Nevine Khalil, Mubarak pointed an accusing finger at unnamed foreign powers "who will be happy to see the peace process grind to a halt".

Mubarak, who was addressing a rally of students at Zagazig University, said that although the bombings had a negative impact on the peace process, "the wheel of peace should keep turning because it represents the right path leading to stability".

Declaring that "the future is for peace," Mubarak said: "All parties should have the courage and determination to achieve a comprehensive peace urgently."

Mubarak praised Palestinian Authority chief Yasser Arafat as a "courageous man who is working to regain the land. What happened is an obstruction to peace and to the recovery of the land."

There were powers, he added, "who will be happy to see the peace process grind to a halt and who contribute to supporting these actions. If there are Palestinians taking part in these actions, they must have been pushed to do so from the outside," by foreign powers, "who stand to benefit from the continuation of the no-war, no-peace situation".

He said the bombings had provided the opponents of Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres with the opportunity to criticise him, but that the Israeli leader was "intent on going forward with the peace process".

While acknowledging the negative impact of the bombings on the peace process, both on the Palestinian and Syrian tracks, and the fact that they had "put the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government in a difficult position", Mubarak maintained that "logic and reason must prevail because this is in the interest of the Palestinians".

Commenting on the new draft press law to replace Law 93 for 1995, Mubarak said: "I am in favour of the draft as long as it strikes a balance between the rights of journalists and the rights of society. If the draft achieves this balance, I welcome it."

On Sudan, Mubarak accused the government of President Omar Al-Bashir of harbouring terrorists, including three who were involved in an attempt on his life in Addis Ababa last June. He said, in an apparent reference to Islamic National Front leader Hassan Al-Turabi, that if "a certain person", believed to be the power behind the Khartoum government, "wants to be a world leader, this is fine, but not at our expense".

Asked about Sudan's reported intention to organise elections in the disputed border region of Halayeb, Mubarak affirmed that Halayeb was Egyptian territory and its residents Egyptian citizens. "We hold elections in Halayeb, not them," he said.



An Israeli soldier atop a watchtower on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Last week Israeli troops barricaded Palestinians inside hundreds of West Bank villages and towns (photo: AP)

Council meets

FOREIGN Minister Amr Moussa, accompanied by a political and parliamentary delegation, will travel to Gaza to attend the first meeting today of the elected Palestinian legislative council. This will be Moussa's first visit to the Palestinian self-rule territories.

The council will consider Israel's demand for amending the PLO's charter to delete provisions that indirectly call for Israel's destruction.

Sudan poll

VOTING began yesterday in Sudan's first legislative and presidential elections since a 1989 military coup that brought General Omar Al-Bashir to power. Ten million Sudanese are eligible to vote for the head of state and 275 members of the 400-seat parliament. The remaining seats have already been selected by the National Congress, a body representing professional groups and provincial powers.

Voting is expected to last until 17 March, but a pre-election poll showed widespread apathy, with 56 per cent saying they intended not to vote. President Al-Bashir faces 40 rivals for the presidency, but is expected to win by a large majority. All serious opposition contenders declared a boycott of what they said were going to be stage-show elections.

Weekly up

STARTING this issue, 263, Al-Ahram Weekly's newsstand price inside Egypt is being hiked up to 75 piastres, a 25 piastre increase over the previous price. This is the first price increase since it first hit the newsstands, on 28 February, five years ago. The Weekly regrets the price increase, made necessary by the rising cost of production inputs, especially newsprint. The editors hope, however, that the plans for 2000-to-be introduced improvements, making the Weekly a more diversified and more entertaining newspaper, will make up for the minor price increase.

INSIDE

Press freedom triumphant... p.2

Interviews and views
Essam Abdel-Magid... p.4
Essam Al-Fahmy... p.4
Essam Youssouf... p.11
Abdel Samir... p.11

Abdel-Aziz Aziz... p.9
Gaber Arafat... p.9
Salman A. Salama... p.9
Mohammed Sid-Ahmed... p.8
Gaber Amin... p.8
Abdel-Aziz Mohamed... p.9

Balancing act... p.3
Going beyond... p.12
The task factor... p.13

Israel's tonne of bricks

As more than a million Palestinians are made to pay the price of Hamas bombings, the group declared it would surrender its arms

Israeli troops confined more than one million Palestinians in the West Bank to their towns and villages and sealed the homes of Islamist militants whose campaign of bombings has terrorised Israel and shaken the peace process.

As the crackdown went into high gear, the Ezzeddin Al-Qassem Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, announced yesterday that it would surrender its arms and explosives to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), reports Tarek Houssein from Gaza. A statement issued by the group, and delivered to the PNA, said the decision had been adopted "in the national interest, and in response to the decisions of the National Authority and the political leadership of Hamas."

The statement, pledging that Hamas would from hereon cease all military operations inside Gaza and outside it, called on Israel to respond positively to this move, warning that "violence only begets violence."

It was not immediately clear what impact this move would have on the crisis.

In Hebron, Nabulus and surrounding refugee

campes, Israeli soldiers arrested dozens of suspected Hamas activists. In the Gaza Strip, Palestinian police raided the Islamic University early yesterday, searching rooms and seizing the school's mosque. And for the first time, Palestinian police and Israeli troops carried out a joint raid on the Askar refugee camp near Nabulus, arresting relatives of suicide bomber Raed Shaghmout.

Army officials said the suicide bomber in Monday's Tel Aviv attack, which killed 12 Israelis, came from Gaza. Security sources said he was helped by an Israeli-Arab arrested the night of the bombing.

Several thousand Palestinians in Nabulus — mostly students and government workers — took part in a peace rally yesterday organised by Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority. As the piped-in voice of Arafat declared "Yes to peace, no to terrorism", Palestinian police broke up a pro-Hamas march by students nearby, beating the marchers and arresting at least 10 people.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian attorney-general sought to demonstrate that Arafat's forces

were joining the battle against Hamas, an apparent response to Israeli protestations about the need for a war on terror to save the PLO's peace talks with Israel. He reported that Palestinian police had arrested about 300 Hamas supporters.

"We are in a state of war with terrorism and terrorists," said Attorney-General Khaled Kidra. "The entire world is fighting terrorism and we are part of the world. We are not standing by and watching."

Four bombings since 25 February, all claimed by the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, have not only killed 55 people but also threatened to put an end to the peace process, by which the Palestinians gained autonomy in the Gaza Strip and six of the West Bank's largest towns.

After the latest bombing, on Monday in downtown Tel Aviv, Israelis gathered to shout the old chants of enmity. "Kill the Arabs," some screamed. Others condemned Prime Minister Shimon Peres as a traitor for giving up land to the Palestinians.

Israeli soldiers and police responded to the

latest attack by setting up roadblocks on Tuesday to confine more than one million Palestinians to 465 towns and villages in the West Bank, and by sealing more than a dozen houses of suspected militants.

On Tuesday night and yesterday morning, both Israeli forces and Palestinian police carried out raids to isolate Hamas cells in strongholds such as universities and mosques.

Although Arafat said his forces were joining the battle, he protested that Israeli raids made without consulting the Palestinians violated the peace accord. "This goes completely against the agreement," he said.

Israel said it would persist in its arrests, however, and security sources confirmed a report in the daily newspaper *Maariv* that the government had decided to use deportations against Hamas leaders, a controversial measure that has not been applied since December 1992 when the government deported 400 Islamist militants. The sources said about 100 activists could be deported.

As the Israeli press warned that further sui-

cide bombings should be expected, the first shipment of high-tech US explosive-detection equipment arrived in Tel Aviv. A US Air Force C-40 cargo plane brought eight sophisticated bomb detectors, part of an emergency anti-terrorism aid package offered by President Bill Clinton.

Clinton said he had offered the package to "support the fight against future terrorist attacks, to bring killers to justice and to rally support for peace in the Middle East". Additional equipment is being assembled from US stocks and will be shipped on an emergency basis in the next few days, the White House said. Clinton is also sending a dozen anti-terrorism experts to help Israeli authorities prevent further attacks.

The man accused of recruiting three of the four suicide bombers was sentenced by a Palestinian state court in Jericho. Mohamed Abu Warda "has been sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour after being convicted of carrying out terrorist actions and harming the interest of the Palestinian nation," Arafat said in a statement.

Bombs under Oslo

Coming on the heels of suicide operations in Jerusalem and Ashkelon, the bombings by Islamist militants in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv on Sunday and Monday have brought the Oslo peace process to the very brink of collapse. Prime Minister Shimon Peres may also pay with his political career for the loss of 55 lives in the space of eight days, a toll unprecedented in either Israel's pre- or post-Oslo eras. And for Yasser Arafat, the possibility that the Israeli army might re-enter the self-rule areas is a nightmare scenario.

Peres is now a leader fighting for his political life. Before the Jerusalem and Ashkelon bombings, he and his ruling Labour coalition enjoyed a 10-15 point lead over their main opposition rival, the Likud Party led by Benjamin Netanyahu. After them, Peres' lead slumped to just four per cent. But now, after two more suicide attacks have claimed an additional 30 Israeli lives, "the right would win a landslide victory," according to Susan Hattis Rotif, an Israeli political scientist allied to the Labour Party.

Each attack has been claimed by factions of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, as "instalments of revenge" for the almost-certainly Israeli-sponsored assassinations of Yehiya Ayyash — the alleged Hamas master bomber killed in Gaza in January — and Islamic Jihad leader Fathi Shakkaki — shot dead in Malta last October.

After Sunday's Jerusalem blast — which left 18 dead and 10 injured — Hamas pledged a "three-month hold" on suicide operations "for Israel to consider its call for a ceasefire". After Monday's Tel Aviv explosion — 12 dead, 109 injured — Hamas pledged the same. For Israel and Arafat's Palestinian Authority (PA), such offers are now not worth the leaflets they are printed on.

Hamas has declared war on Israel, declared a haggard-looking Peres on Sunday, "and Israel will act accordingly". In addition to continuing the closure of the Occupied Territories imposed after the initial Jerusalem and Ashkelon atrocities, the Israeli prime minister announced "severe new security measures" aimed at "uprooting Hamas to its foundations". The homes of suicide bombers would be demolished, he said, and their family members arrested. After the Tel Aviv blast, Peres went further, vowing that Is-

The latest bombings in Israel have probably scuppered Shimon Peres' chances in the upcoming elections and written the epitaph for the Oslo peace process. **Graham Usher** writes from Jerusalem

rael "will go into any corner where terror has taken root".

Asked whether this meant that the Israeli army would re-enter Palestinian self-rule areas, the prime minister hedged. But his Religious Affairs Minister Shimon Shetret did not. "Unequivocally yes," he said.

Peres' last remaining task is to put an ever greater squeeze on Arafat to "act decisively" against Hamas. After the first bombings, the Israeli leader said he was "considering" postponing the Israeli army's redeployment in Hebron, due to be completed by April. On Sunday he said he saw "no point" in commencing Oslo's final state negotiations on Jerusalem, Jewish settlements and borders, due to open in May, "if the facts remain as they are today".

Coupled with the threat of the Israeli army's imminent return to the self-rule areas, this is a grim prospect indeed for the PLO leader. And he too has acted accordingly. In the last week, PNA security forces have arrested upwards of 350 Palestinians suspected of harbouring "unlicensed weapons" and mobilised armoured personnel carriers on the streets of Gaza.

And on Sunday Arafat declared illegal six non-PNA militias in the self-rule areas, including Hamas' Izzadin Al-Qassem and Islamic Jihad's Qassem brigades. After the Tel Aviv explosion, he crossed one more rubicon. "I will cooperate fully with Israel to wipe out terrorism," he said.

But Arafat is reluctant to move full-scale against Hamas' established political leadership, fearing — rightly — that such a step would only strengthen the hard-liners in the movement and risk civil turmoil in the self-rule areas. Instead, he has urged such leaders to bring their military wing under some form of control.

They made an attempt to do this on Monday. "Hamas demands that Ezzeddin Al-Qassem and the followers of the martyr Yehiya Ayyash everywhere halt military attacks," announced Gaza-based Hamas leader Mohamed Shama.

But such demands will probably be to little avail. For the recent armed attacks have exposed the fact that Hamas is no longer a unified movement in the occupied and self-rule territories. After the initial bombings, Hamas, Izzadin Al-Qassem and Yehiya Ayyash units — all Hamas factions — issued contradictory statements claiming, disclaiming and finally reclaiming the suicide operations. Then came the offers to the Israeli government of a conditional ceasefire — pledges broken no sooner than they were made.

The root of these dissensions is unclear. But sources suggest a split between Hamas/Ezzeddin Al-Qassem in Gaza and Ezzeddin Al-Qassem cells in the West Bank allied to Hamas' more radical leadership abroad. On 23 February, two days before the first Jerusalem and Ashkelon bombings, there were reports that the PA and Ezzeddin Al-Qassem in Gaza had struck a deal. Hamas would "freeze all military operations" in return for the PA "protecting" 40 of its activists wanted by the Israeli government.

But for factions of Ezzeddin Al-Qassem in the West Bank, sources said, such a "deal" signalled nothing less than their own abandonment, not just by the PA but also by their Gaza-based leadership.

So Hamas' return, after a seven-month hiatus, to the politics of suicide operations may not entirely represent a unified response to avenge Ayyash and Shakkaki. The attacks are also signals — from dissidents in Hamas to Israel, Arafat and their own political leadership — that any "ceasefire" must come with conditions and must include them. "We want those brothers... offering Israel a truce, that they must immediately stop making any statements because we have a clear programme and we are committed to every word we say," said a Hamas statement issued after Sunday's Jerusalem attack.

But whatever the cause, the impact of the operations is plain. They have enraged the Israeli people, gravely weakened Arafat and probably scuppered Peres' chances of being re-elected as prime minister. And, in the fallout, they will have sunk the Oslo peace process.



KURASAT ISTRATJIYA (34)



(In Arabic and English)

Vol. V

- 23- Intra-Arab State Conflicts
- 24- The League of Arab States: Prospective Challenges
- 25- Islamic Fundamentalism and its Image in the Western Media
- 26- Management of Ethnic Issues in the Arab World
- 27- Mediterraneanism: A New Dimension in Egypt's Foreign Policy
- 28- Israeli Nuclear Arsenal: Challenge and Response
- 29- Conventional Arms Control In The Middle East

30- The Clash of Civilizations and the Humanitarian Alternative

- 31- Qualitative Military Superiority
- 32- Women Conference in Beijing
- 33- The Middle Eastern Market in the Arab Israeli Peace Equation
- 34- The Religious trends in the Arab Maghreb, A comparative Analysis

Mohamed Abdel-Salam
Dr. No'man Galal
Dr. Olaf H. Agha
Dr. Saad El Ibrahim
Dr. Mohamed El Sayed Selim
Dr. Zakaria Hussein
Dr. Abdel Monem Said
Ahmed Ibrahim Mahmoud
Dr. Milad Hanna
Ahmed Ibrahim Mahmoud
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Partners in progress

By Ali Soliman

Following the expansion of the European Union (EU), Europe's attention shifted to the nations of the southern Mediterranean. During the 1994 Essen Summit, the European Commission put forth its new Mediterranean policy, one that advocated an expansion of ties going beyond the mere signing of financial agreements and protocols.

The EU's new focus would revolve around a more comprehensive dialogue dealing with social, political and economic issues. This new approach was made more immediate by fears that social, political and economic turmoil in countries like Algeria and Libya would spill over the borders of European nations.

At the same time, the establishment of GATT and its successor, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meant that developed and developing countries must abide by the principles of trade liberalisation. Free trade was no longer confined to trade in goods, but in services as well.

The most important component of the economic aspect of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership is the eventual creation of a free trade zone in the Mediterranean region by the year 2010. The proposed free trade zone would encompass around 600 million people spread over countries with varying levels of national incomes and purchasing power.

There are, however, drawbacks to the EU's new strategy. Abolishing tariffs on industrial products will be of no benefit to non-EU Mediterranean countries as these countries have already signed trade agreements with the EU to allow their industrial products into the EU zone, free of tariff restrictions.

The existing Euro-Mediterranean partnership agreements are simply one way of ensuring that EU products receive preferential treatment in southern Mediterranean countries. Under the agreements, the countries of the southern Mediterranean are given up to 12 years to abolish tariffs currently imposed on European industrial products. These nations must, therefore, cushion themselves from the repercussions arising from opening their markets to high-quality exports from Europe.

But the abilities of southern Mediterranean nations to withstand competition from European goods varies from one country to another. Countries like Algeria, Libya and Syria are still under the shadow of controlled economies, and consequently are plagued by an ailing public sector whose productivity is consistently diminishing. Others, like Lebanon, Israel, Tunisia and Turkey have a small industrial base, but are relatively open to foreign investment. These countries have also implemented economic reform measures and have embraced a free market economy.

Somewhere in between these two extremes, are those nations that have a large industrial base and are pursuing limited economic reform. The progress of the reform initiatives, however, is hindered by incomplete privatisation programmes, markets that do not operate under the forces of demand and supply and a large public sector. Egypt, Morocco and Jordan fall in this category.

In recognition of the challenges that southern Mediterranean countries would face as they adapt to greater competition from European goods, the EU has offered financial assistance amounting to approximately \$6 billion for the development of industrial projects. However, this figure is earmarked for the southern Mediterranean region as a whole. Moreover, very often it benefits projects that do not necessarily produce high quality industries, in turn discouraging competition.

Joint cooperation programmes linking universities and research centres in the south and the north of the Mediterranean are another aspect of the EU's new policy. Similarly, greater cooperation in the media on social and environmental issues is aimed at raising social awareness of the benefits of partnership. The Euro-Mediterranean partnership also encourages cooperation between cities of the southern Mediterranean zone and Europe to alleviate social hardships arising from low income and unemployment.

In addition, the partnership agreement with Tunisia and the on-going negotiations with Egypt are aimed at furthering political pluralism, raising the standard of democracy and human rights. The partnership agreements are expected to include a legal framework that would allow the EU to follow the progress of democratisation in southern Mediterranean countries. Economic cooperation will become increasingly linked to how successfully these objectives are realised.

The security aspect of the partnership has also received top priority. It aims at eradicating organised crime, drug-smuggling, money laundering, terrorism and social disorder. These social ills are no longer problems facing individual nations, but have become a multi-national concern requiring regional cooperation.

Having examined the different aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, it is worthwhile assessing Egypt's potential gains and losses. The southern Mediterranean rim, with the exception of Turkey, comprises a market of 150 million people. This figure, however, is expected to rise to 230 million in the next 15 years, the same time at which the agreements with the EU would have entered the implementation stage. The total GDP of the concerned countries is around \$210 billion at present and it is expected to reach \$400 billion in 2010. The individual share of the GDP will increase in varying degrees depending on the success of developmental programmes implemented, and the average population growth rate in these nations.

The southern Mediterranean is not just an important market for EU products, but its nations are essential partners in the development process. The benefits accrued from a Mediterranean free trade zone will undoubtedly benefit both sides, albeit in unequal measures. Southern Mediterranean products will face tough competition and can only reach European markets through careful preparation. Detailed studies to define the relative current and future advantage to each country is required to withstand foreign competition.

In the absence of such studies, it is necessary to outline a number of observations. First, it is undoubtedly the stronger party that would benefit from the partnership. Another determinant is the ability of each country to capitalise on the opportunities presented by open markets.

Trade figures reveal that some southern Mediterranean countries are in a better position than others to increase their export capacity. In Morocco, industrial exports have increased from 24 per cent of total exports in 1979 to 66 per cent in 1993. Tunisia has increased its industrial exports from 40 per cent of total exports to 77 per cent, and industrial exports from Turkey and Israel were around 70 per cent of total exports. In the case of Egypt, the percentage of industrial exports has begun to rise in the last two years, particularly textiles, clothes and cement.

The second observation is that trade cannot bring about economic development and integration without European technological assistance.

Third, the EU partnership calls for a change in the institutions governing economic activities in the public and private sectors. Economic development depends on a sound financial base. Fourth, the southern Mediterranean countries have not entered into partnerships of their own before negotiating their individual partnership agreements with the EU. Therefore, they have not dealt with the EU as one unified bloc — a factor which would have improved their negotiating power.

A Mediterranean free trade area would also necessitate a re-evaluation of trade relations between Egypt and the United States, Japan and the former Soviet republics, which might have political and economic repercussions. Egypt needs to have a well-defined strategy outlining its future relations with leading economic and political powers.

Finally, an EU partnership does not imply that Egypt will overlook its traditionally close relationship with Arab states, particularly that with the Arabian peninsula, Sudan, Libya and Iraq, which are excluded from the EU partnership agreements. Egypt at one time enjoyed active trade relations with these states and they still provide great export potential for the country. We need to strengthen Egyptian-Arab relations and reach agreements with Arab countries similar to those negotiated with the EU.

The writer is undersecretary for research, Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Balancing act

As privatisation is poised to gain momentum, parliamentary debates last week focused on the dilemma of balancing economic and social targets, writes Gamal Essam El-Din

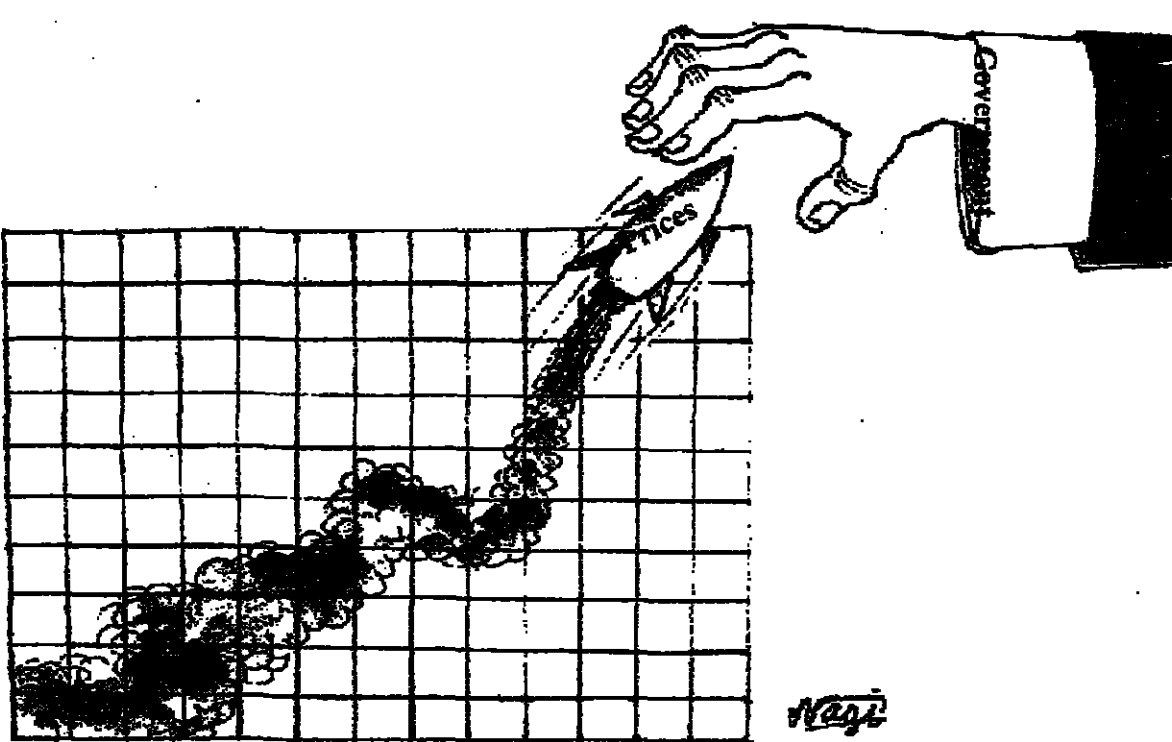
The government's commitment to minimise the short-term social costs of economic reform, the main force delaying the privatisation process, is proving to be a complex task. Discussions in the parliamentary committees this week revealed the difficulty of protecting members of the low-income brackets and incorporating public sector companies into a free market system during the adjustment process.

In fact, members of parliament last week found that balancing the social costs of reform with the needs of a market economy were adversely affecting some public sector companies and slowing down their switch to market-oriented policies.

One such case was discussed by the People's Assembly Industrial Committee. A presidential decree, issued in September 1994, forced electricity distribution companies to reduce the rates for some productive sectors in the 10th of Ramadan City along with some low-income areas in Cairo. It was revealed that this decree cost eight electricity distribution companies a staggering LE420 million in fiscal 1994/95.

Samir Mohamed Ali, chairman of the Holding Company for Electricity Distribution, stated the presidential decree came at the distribution companies' expense because, according to Public Sector Law 203, otherwise known as the privatisation law, holding companies are required to operate according to principles of a free market economy. "The amount which we lost due to the presidential decree could have been used in improving the performance of electricity grids in Egypt," said Ali. Electricity companies are currently forced to buy electricity from the Egyptian Electricity Organisation at 11 pence per kilowatt and sell to customers at 9 pence per kilowatt.

All conceded that high electricity prices negatively affect some productive and low-income sectors. But, he emphasised: "pricing was in response to state policies and we are just employees in the state... we raise and lower prices when we are asked to do so." Ali also



demand that high-income communities in Cairo and Alexandria, as well as sporting and social clubs, should be charged higher prices. He noted that these sectors "still pay just 25 per cent of the total consumption value."

Abdel-Rehim Ismail, chairman of Cairo's Electricity Distribution Company, said the presidential decree cost the company as much as LE30 million. "This denied us the opportunity of reconstructing our crumbling grid," he said.

However, members of the Industry Committee criticised the policies of the electricity companies asserting that the price of electricity is still too high. The committee's chairman, Amin Mubarak, said that despite the presidential decree, a Central Auditing Agency (CAA) report, addressing the performance of these companies, revealed that the electricity distribution companies' sales rose from LE630 million in 1993 to LE752 million in 1994, while Cairo's Electricity Distribution Company share of the pie alone ap-

proached the LE205 million mark.

While the electricity companies complained of the effects of social considerations, members of the Cultural Committee charged that implementing market-oriented policies in the cultural sector could deny limited-income groups the access to affordable cultural activities.

Discussions of a similar nature prevailed in a recent PA Cultural Committee. Farouk Hosni, the minister of culture, indicated that cultural activities will remain a service provided by the state to all incomes and social classes. He added that the commitment to this service is exemplified by state subsidised theatre ticket prices, subsidised books from the General Book Organisation, public cultural palaces, public libraries in towns and villages and state institutes for art studies.

The Chairman of the Culture Committee, Salah El-Tarouty and deputies Ahmed Abdel-Halim and Ezzat Mabrouk asked Hosni if there is a new outlook for culture within the context of the

state's current trend towards privatisation. Hosni emphasised that culture is not only a service but primarily an economic investment. "I'm sorry to say that there seems to be a strange perception of culture for some in Egypt," Hosni said, adding that Egypt has a comparative advantage in cultural activities, and therefore the country should make use of that, "because when the state is thriving culturally, it will grow economically."

"For example, we should now adopt an economic versus emotional perspective regarding cinema in Egypt," said Hosni. He indicated that a new cinema project, recently approved by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, aimed at establishing "a large joint-venture company owned by the state, banks and the private sector which will be involved in renting cinema theatres at new prices and marketing Egyptian films abroad."

Deputies expressed fears, however, that middle income households, especially in Upper Egypt, will be discouraged from going to the cinema due to high-

er prices.

In addition to culture, the PA last week also discussed the problem of reconciling the demands of farmers with the necessity of liberalising the prices of agricultural inputs.

In a meeting held by the Assembly's Agriculture and Irrigation Committee, MPs focused on the sudden, drastic drop in the supply of fertilisers in the market, and the need to arrive at solutions that would meet the needs of farmers, especially small-scale ones, in the coming agricultural season.

A considerable number of deputies, who are farmers themselves, held the six public sector fertiliser production companies, as well as private sector traders, responsible for the shortage of fertilisers in the wake of liberalised agricultural policies.

Deputies charged that the new liberalisation measures encouraged fertiliser companies to export large quantities in an attempt to secure as much profit as possible at the expense of farmers' needs. Consequently, said MP Ahmed Wafik El-

Qayati, a one million ton fertiliser shortage in the market resulted in skyrocketing prices. Prices shot up from LE20 to LE90 per ton, thereby stretching the financial capacity of most small-scale farmers, and ultimately impairing land productivity.

Mostafa El-Seid, a former economy minister and chairman of the Assembly's Economic Affairs Committee, put it succinctly: He said that the fertiliser crisis is just an example of the difficult balance the government is trying to strike as it adopts liberalisation and privatisation policies while taking into account the social aspect at the same time.

"Before liberalisation, the government was the main controller of fertiliser production and distribution, and farmers were guaranteed access to fertilisers at subsidised prices. But when the government decided to adopt free market policies and give the private sector a larger role in the distribution of fertilisers, it was confronted with numerous difficulties," commented El-Seid. He acknowledged that the fertiliser companies could not be held responsible because they were instructed to maximise profits in accordance with new liberalisation measures.

"When fertiliser companies realised that the LE800 per ton export price is far higher than the LE400 domestic price, they all exported their products at the expense of local needs," noted El-Seid. According to El-Seid, if the government wants to provide farmers with inexpensive fertilisers, it will, in effect, go against its liberalisation policies.

Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid asserted that the entire production of fertiliser companies will be delivered to agricultural development banks at 1994 prices in an attempt to ensure that fertilisers are sold to farmers at reasonable prices. However, he cautioned, farmers should not increase the area of land used to cultivate rice, potatoes and fruit as these crops consume large amounts of fertilisers. "If any drop occurred as a result, the government will in no way be responsible for providing farmers with extra fertilisers."

Leather industry on the mend

Over the past decade, the production of leather goods, especially shoes has increased dramatically, opening new doors for export. However, producers complain that their ability to compete in local and international markets is being eroded by the rising costs of accessories, labour, overhead expenses and customs duties.

Figures from the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS) reveal that 50 per cent of Egypt's leather exports find their way to eastern European states while another 40 per cent is purchased by other Arab countries. The remaining 10 per cent is distributed throughout the rest of Europe.

The production of shoes tops the list of leather products churned out by Egyptian factories. According to a study by the Egyptian Export Promotion Centre (EEPC), 80 per cent of the leather industry's total production is made up of shoes. This figure is the result of the toil of some 60,000 workers who produce approximately 80 million pairs of shoes annually.

Although shoe exports have increased dramatically from 1989 to 1991, jumping from 1.4 million to 3.4 million pairs, or from LE18 million to LE64 million, these figures do not reflect Egypt's actual production and export potential in this industry.

To bridge this production gap, manufacturers are urging the government to reduce customs duties on capital goods, lower the cost of energy, and provide export incentives. They maintain that by eliminating additional costs not borne by their foreign counterparts, Egyptian manufacturers can in-

crease their competitiveness.

Kamal Hafez Ramadan, chairman of the Chamber of Leather Industries, said that leather manufacturers have to pay customs duties ranging from 10 to 50 per cent on their imported production requirements, machinery and spare parts. In addition, they have to deal with soaring electricity bills. Therefore, Egyptian leather footwear has been unable to gain a stronger footing in the European market.

"In the final analysis, the Egyptian product ends up selling at a higher price, due to the additional costs imposed on producers," said Ramadan.

Another obstacle for domestic producers is, "imported shoes which are smuggled from Port Said and Libya into the country and sold at prices much lower than locally-manufactured goods, posing a serious threat to the local shoe industry," he added. "Tighter security and customs measures in Port Said and at the Libyan borders, he stressed, are imperative to put an end to the smuggling."

He added that the establishment of sea links connecting Egyptian harbours with those of the Gulf and African states will give Egyptian leather exporters access to untapped markets. Egypt, he urged, should convince countries from which it imports raw materials to accept part of the value of their goods in the form of Egyptian leather products.

According to other industry officials, however,

government policies are a main reason why leather producers are at a disadvantage. Ahmed Shalabi, Chairman of the Federation of Cooperative Societies for the Shoe Industry, criticised the government for opening the door for imported shoes. He claims that "foreign manufacturers have the advantage of advanced technology. And, unlike Egyptian producers, they do not have to pay a sales tax and customs on their production requirements."

The costs borne by manufacturers have not only reflected on exports, but also on the local market where the prices of shoes have soared to unprecedented levels. A reasonably good pair of shoes costs around LE100 and above, on average. Anything less is considered mediocre. "It has reached a point where low-income families can't afford to buy shoes for their family," noted Shalabi.

Mamdouh Thabet Mikki, chairman of the Chamber for Leather Tanning Industries, said that it was only in the last six months that the prices of leather products and shoes reached these unusually high levels. This, he said, is primarily a result of speculation between manufacturers and suppliers of raw materials.

However, said Mikki, the Ministry of Supply is about to implement a system to regulate trading in leather with the expected result being that prices will level off.

He noted that the high price of shoes is not attributed to the cost of leather tanning. This cost does not exceed 25 per cent of the price of medium-quality shoes, and is less than 25 per cent of the cost of expensive shoes.

In an attempt to alleviate the burden shouldered by low-income families, the Ministries of Social Affairs and Local Government have entrusted cooperative societies and Bata shoe stores with the task of selling shoes at moderate prices to civil servants and pensioners. The beneficiaries can buy shoes from these outlets and pay in 10 monthly instalments at only 6 per cent interest. The prices of these shoes range from LE15 to LE21 for children's shoes and LE19 to LE26 for adults' shoes.

Mikki refuted suggestions that leather used for local production is of inferior quality than that used for export.

The tanning industry has also fallen on hard times since a decree was issued to move tanneries from Old Cairo, where 80 per cent of tanneries are located, to Badr City, 47 km away from the capital. As a result of this decree, no infrastructural maintenance work has been done on the present site although the tanneries have yet to be relocated. This led to a constant interruption in the supply of electricity and water, and an inefficient drainage system which has impeded production.

But, according to Mikki, moving the tanneries to Badr City is a step in the right direction for promoting the shoe industry. Moving the factories, he said, will reduce production costs. "Ninety per cent of tannery owners have agreed to relocate," he stated.

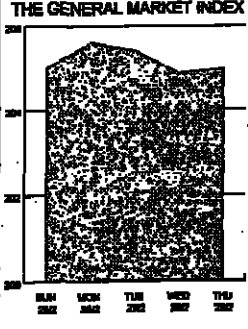
Market report

Misr Cafe gains steam

A SLOW week of trading in the Capital Market left the General Market Index 0.05 points lower than when it opened. For the week ending 29 February, the GMI closed at 205.02 points and the volume of transactions was 40 per cent lower than it was two weeks ago, levelling off at LE35.09 million.

While the trading picture was, on the whole, gloomy, the manufacturing sector reversed its lengthy downward trend, with its index gaining 1.59 points to close at 265.93. This long-awaited increase is partly a result of an increase in the share value of 16 of the sector's companies. Of those, Misr Cafe led the pack, with its shares increasing by LE350 to close at LE1,400 per share. Percentage-wise, however, Family Foods was the big winner, its shares witnessing a 45.7 per cent increase in their value or LE64.3 to top off at LE205 per share. Other companies did not fare so well. Shares of the Alexandria Portland Cement Company suffered the biggest blows, losing 21.13 per cent of

their value to close at LE358. Both the North Cairo Mills Company and the Eastern Tobacco Company lost LE1.25 each, closing at LE87.25 and LE40.75 respectively. And, although the Helwan Portland Cement Company dominated the market in terms of the value and volume of transactions, con-



cerning 23.65 per cent of the total number of shares traded, its shares ended LE95 lower than the opening price. Roughly LE5.42 million of its shares were traded.

Trading in financial sector company stocks was relatively slow, with the sector's index gaining 4.72 points to close at 214.32. Shares of the Commercial International Bank lost LE1.5 per share to close at LE475.

For a change, the service sector saw some trading activity, its index gaining 0.8 points to close at 136.03. Shares of Misr Hotels (Hilton) increased by LE1.25 to level off at LE54.25.

In all, the shares of 23 companies increased in value, 27 decreased and 28 remained at the same price.

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Mohamed Salmawy

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Reconciliation tops Arab agenda

Secretary-general of the Arab League for the second term, Esmat Abdel-Meguid, is aware of the problems of his organisation and those of the Arab world. But, as he told Dina Ezzat, he is hopeful that things will take a turn for the better



You have begun your second term as secretary-general of the Arab League at a time when the Arab world is going through rough times, both politically and economically. So, what will be your main concerns?

There are three issues that will rank high on our agenda in the years to come. The first is inter-Arab reconciliation, which I have addressed in my initiative for Arab national reconciliation. I'll say more about that later. The second issue focuses on the achievement of a comprehensive, just and durable peace as the culmination of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

In this respect, the League of Arab States adopted Resolution 5092 on 12 September 1991 at the regular session of the Council of Foreign Ministers. This resolution welcomed the peace initiative almost 50 days before the convening of Madrid. Thus we indicated our strategic commitment to a solution based on the relevant Security Council resolutions as well as on the principle of the exchange of land for peace.

Since then, the Arab League has continued to exert its efforts in support of the Arab negotiating parties, in the hope of

seeing a successful outcome of the negotiations within that framework. Great progress has been made, but much remains to be done to reach a successful conclusion to the final stage of negotiations on the Palestinian-Israeli track, as well as to ensure a successful outcome of the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli negotiations.

The third issue is to promote the establishment of an Arab free trade area as a preliminary step towards the establishment of an Arab free market. This is a key challenge facing the Arab world in the age of macro-regional blocs.

But economic cooperation and a just peace for the Arabs are dependent on good inter-Arab political relations. Meanwhile, enthusiasm for political reconciliation has not been consistent?

I launched my initiative for pan-Arab national reconciliation in March 1995, and I have waited some time for the dust of the Gulf War to settle. Meanwhile, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan, president of the United Arab Emirates, have spoken strongly in support of reconciliation. From what we read and

observe, reconciliation now seems to be more welcomed and accepted by Arab public opinion. Even the official political landscape of the Arab world has changed positively since the Gulf crisis.

Actually, there is an emerging consensus that the Arab world is at a crossroads and that something needs to be done, and this is providing the necessary momentum for the reconciliation process.

Reconciliation, as I indicated in my initiative, must be based on a frank and genuine dialogue and on the respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our member states.

The sad situations in Iraq and Libya seem to be dragging on forever. Do you see an end to the sufferings of these two Arab nations in the near future?

Regarding Iraq, since the second Gulf crisis we have been reiterating the three important elements that constitute our policy on the issue. First, Iraq should comply fully, and the sooner the better, with all relevant Security Council resolutions to help in lifting the sanctions. Second, we are concerned about the human sufferings of

the Iraqi people and we are doing our best to alleviate this suffering. Third, we remain committed to the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. We support this as a matter of principle and also in the strategic interests of the Arab world. A divided Iraq would jeopardise the balance of power throughout the whole region, as well as in the Gulf, and thus threaten our security.

As far as Libya is concerned, the Arab League unanimously adopted Resolution 5373 in its Ministerial Council's session of March 1994. This resolution calls for a fair trial of the two suspects, either before a panel of Scottish judges in accordance with Scottish law, or at the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

Libya has the right, according to international law and custom, not to hand its citizens over to another country, particularly in the absence of an extradition treaty. We are still exerting our efforts to reach a solution to this crisis based on international law and ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Libya. We hope that the concerned Western powers will respond favourably to our proposal.

Many attribute the failure of the League to do anything about these problems to the fact that the League itself needs help. How do you plead?

The League of Arab States is before anything else the crystallisation of the Arab identity, which remains strong despite the changes, positive or negative, which inter-Arab relations are facing.

The League aims at promoting cooperation and coordination among its members in all fields. In a world where regionalism and the building of regional groupings and blocs are becoming the trend of the future, the League is the political and institutional expression of a naturally-existing socio-cultural region. As such, it will have to deal with the task of renewing its institutions and functions to deal with change, both at international and regional levels. This is a basic task on our collective agenda and I am confident that we will address it successfully because it will be beneficial to all our members.

Moreover, there is a tendency to maintain a reductionist view of the League. As a body, the League has 17 specialised agencies covering a wide variety of functions,

ranging from the economic to the social and cultural. Many achievements have been made in these sectors, but much remains to be done towards the comprehensive development of our societies.

Many argue that the way to reform the Arab League is to amend its charter. What is the word on this point?

We had two approaches to this issue. The first called for the drafting of a new charter. The second, which has the support of the required majority, was to add annexes to the existing charter.

Although our basic aim is to reform the Arab League to incorporate new conditions in a changing world and to increase its effectiveness in its various tasks, we believe that at this juncture, we should proceed with limited and yet important changes, starting with the establishment of an Arab Court of Justice as stipulated in the charter.

The aim of this court is to provide the League with a judicial instrument to settle inter-Arab disputes. We are very hopeful that progress will be made on the court at the council's meeting next week.

Falougi urges Israeli prudence

Emad Al-Falougi, a former Hamas leader, tells Tarek Hassan in Gaza that dialogue with the Islamist group is the only way out of the current dilemma

Over the last few months, controversy has surrounded the figure of Emad Al-Falougi, a former founder of Hamas's military wing and now a member of the Palestinian self-rule council. Hamas disowned him last November after he edged closer to the Palestinian Authority. Soon afterwards, Al-Falougi assumed the directorship of the National Dialogue Bureau. His rising fortune was underscored by his successful candidacy in the January elections, but not without a scare. Falougi at first appeared to be a winner, then declared a loser, before finally taking the North Gaza seat at the later stage of counting a few days after the elections.

How do you explain the recent upsurge of Hamas suicide attacks?

The bombings started as a reaction to the killing of Yehya Ayyash. Since his assassination, political analysts seemed certain that Hamas would not allow the incident to pass without retaliating. Everyone expected the attacks, but no one knew when and how they would take place. The earlier attacks in Jerusalem and Ashkelon did not come as a complete surprise even to the Israelis.

However, the next two bombings, and the contradictory statements that followed, set a climate of confusion and vagueness. Uncertainty about who exactly was behind the attacks is creeping in. Hamas claimed responsibility in some statements, its military wing, Ezzezzin Al-Qassab, declared itself responsible in others, while the new followers of Ayyash also said they were behind the attacks. There have been reports on divisions within Hamas. In my opinion, those behind the suicide operations are in the grip of political chaos.

Does the chaos indicate that there are opposing factions inside Hamas competing to carry out the attacks?

There is obvious confusion and obscurity in these events, which makes it difficult for an observer to analyse the situation without difficulty. This is the first time that Hamas has been involved in incidents which are clouded by statements that lack credibility. Consequently, everyone is in doubt and no one fully understands what is actually happening.

Israel is expected to strike at Hamas in retaliation, which is likely to lead to more suicide operations in the future. Is Hamas capable of containing along this path? Will the attacks become an ongoing scenario?

It is up to Israel to choose the options and not Hamas. Israel is a state, while Hamas is a movement. Israel is governed by laws by which it must abide. Stability and security in the region are more important to Israel, and therefore, Israel must think carefully, because a spiral of violence featuring attacks and counterattacks could go on for a long time. I predict that Israel will be the more prudent party in dealing with the latest events.

What are your predictions based on?

I do not expect Israel to retaliate in the near future,

mainly because it wants to allay fears, calm the situation and avoid any escalation.

Tension has once more returned to the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. Do you think that both parties are capable of containing the situation, or do you foresee an escalation of tension?

I predict and believe that the solution does not lie in more tension, arrests and threats. Hamas is a strong movement, it is not a small organisation. It has a large and extended network inside and outside of Palestine. Dialogue is the only option. And Israel is quite experienced in this sphere. Israel also realises that a confrontation with Hamas will trigger a powerful reaction.

The PA's latest talks with Hamas in Cairo proved to be a success. Hamas pledged to refrain from embarrassing the PA, and it abided by its promise for a few months, until Israel violated the agreement and assassinated Ayyash. Through dialogue, Hamas can regain control of its forces and organise its work, which will ensure greater stability in the area.

Selim Al-Zaanoun, head of the PA delegation to the Cairo talks, said that three Hamas leaders who participated in the talks were receiving instructions from a Zionist organisation, as well as from Damascus and Tehran. And the PA has implicated foreign hands in the latest suicide bombings. Would you care to comment?

I would not like to comment on this issue. Hamas has a leadership inside the self-rule areas. The leadership in Gaza has intervened, albeit at the last moment, with a clear demand to its military wing to put an end to the attacks. The onus now lies with the PA to put all its efforts into reaching a comprehensive agreement with Hamas to improve their relationship without giving any foreign party the chance to intervene.

Is the PA currently holding talks with Hamas? The PA has to begin and continue these talks.

The PA has accused some elements in Hamas of holding secret talks with Israel and that the recent suicide bombings followed these talks. Is that true?

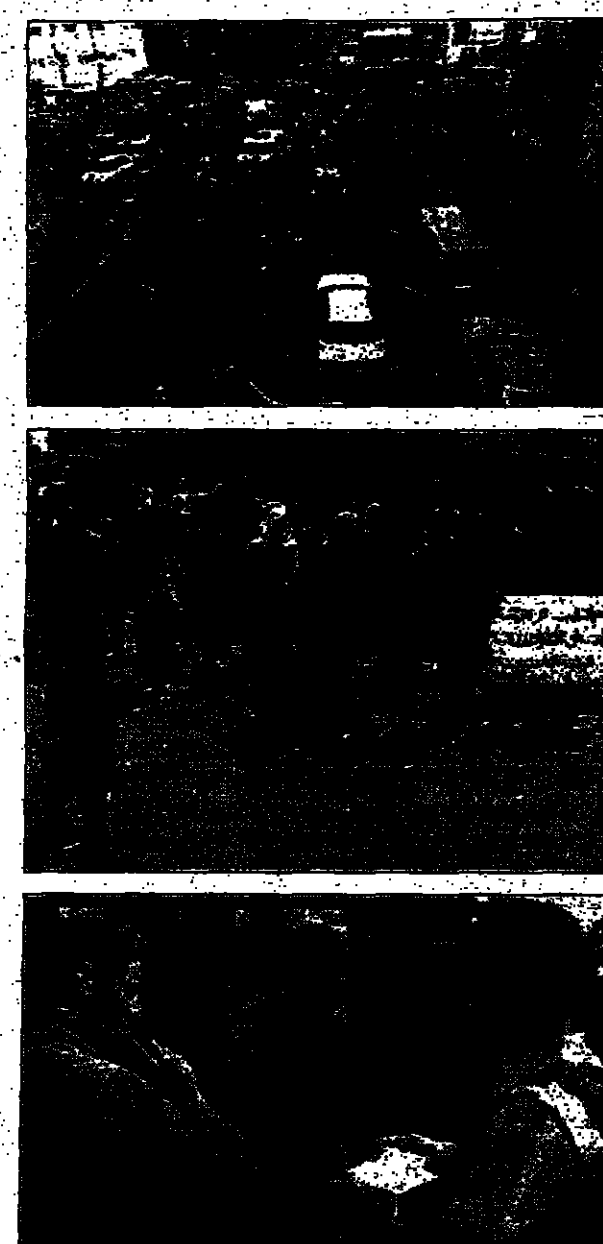
I doubt it. I also doubt that Hamas has any contact or involvement with Israel. What happened recently is nothing more than a reaction. Admittedly, the recent suicide attacks will benefit certain parties inside Israel, but this cannot be a deliberate strategy and it also cannot be one of the objectives of the military wing.

After the Tel Aviv bombing, Hamas's military wing issued a new statement saying that it would cease its attacks in accordance with the instructions of the political leadership. How reliable is this pledge?

I hope it will be different from the earlier statements, and that it is credible.



IN THE aftermath of a series of bombings in Tel Aviv, Ashkelon and Jerusalem over a period of 10 days, Israel intensified security measures in Palestinian areas. It established roadblocks with armed guards manning them and checking the identity cards of car drivers and other passengers. Israel also suspended peace talks with Syria and threatened to stop the implementation of its peace accords with the Palestinians. In Gaza, thousands of Palestinians demonstrated to protest the suicide bombings. (photos: AFP / Reuters)



Algeria's FLN changes benches

Leadership elections in Algeria's National Liberation Front were held last week. The fresh line-up seems to have sealed the party's shift from opposition ranks towards the government. But for how long, asks Amira Howaldy

A month after the swift change of power in the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) brought Ben Hamouda to the post of secretary-general as successor to Abdel-Hamid Mehri, elections for the party's political bureau last week produced unexpected results. Not only are 10 out of the political bureau's 16 elected members supporters of Mehri, but many of the FLN's old guard were dismissed.

Those excluded include Mohamed Saleh Al-Yahawi, who was a presidential nominee after the death of former President Houari Boumedienne, and two former foreign ministers, Abdel-Aziz Boutefliqa and Ahmed Taleb Al-Ibrahimi. Even Rabeh Bittat, famous for his leadership during the Algerian War of Independence, barely scraped onto the new list of bureau members.

Ben Hamouda sees the party's future differently from his predecessor. His first statements on coming to office clearly indicated that he foresaw a rapprochement between the FLN and the government. His words reflected the growing rift inside the FLN between those who follow the government line and those, such as Mehri, who oppose it. Ben Hamouda has been accused of winning his new post unfairly by bringing forward the date of the elections for the position of secretary-general. They were originally scheduled for May.

Ben Hamouda's wish that the party breaks away from the National Charter Group has also been met with mixed feelings, triggering speculation on the future of the FLN's internal unity. The group, combining the FLN, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the Socialist Forces Front, the Rally for Culture and Democracy and the Al-Nahda Party, was formed at the end of 1994. Following a conference in January 1995, the group issued a state-

ment in Rome known as the National Charter which calls for the non-interference of the army in political affairs and the abrogation of the decision to ban the FIS.

The results of the political bureau elections may, however, actually settle the internal dispute since the majority of the elected members are considered to be followers of Mehri and include such loyal supporters of his as Abdel-Aziz Bel-Khadem, Ali Ben Flice and Ali Sediki. Observers believe that the heavy defeat suffered by Ben Hamouda's supporters will be an obstacle in the way of the new secretary-general's wish to normalise relations with the government.

Abdel-Aziz Bel-Khadem, a leading member of the political bureau, believes the bureau will pursue the FLN's "independent" policy of calling for a comprehensive political solution. "We do not follow the policy of anyone," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, when asked if the bureau would follow Mehri's policy. Does the bureau have plans to change the party's stance on the National Charter? Bel-Khadem replied that the issue had not yet been discussed, "but the content of the charter still remains valid". Asked if this means encouraging dialogue with

the FIS, he said that "conflict resolution measures should be taken with the front".

Ben Hamouda told reporters, after assuming his new post, that his party was reconsidering its position on the FIS. He also pointed out that the FLN intended to break away from the National Charter Group. Bel-Khadem pointed out, however, that although the bureau had no plans to change the party's policy, "the coming general conference will determine the line of the FLN for the coming period".

Asked if the position of Ben Hamouda as secretary-general is permanent, Bel-Khadem answered, "only until the general conference", implying that the early secretary-general elections were not completely legal.

According to Ibrahim Youssri, former Egyptian ambassador to Algeria, the Algerian government has consistently tried to penetrate the FLN since the party broke out of its grip in 1989. "But Mehri was too strong to respond. That is why they were pleased to see him go," he said.

"Ben Hamouda," said Youssri, "is not strong enough to lead the party towards his pro-government policy and that explains Bel-Khadem's prediction that he may not remain secretary-general after the FLN's general conference".

The results of the political bureau elections indicate that Mehri's desire to keep the FLN away from the government's grip will prevail. "The FLN is Algeria's most powerful party. It still has among its members all the former officials, the fighters who took part in the war of independence and the elite of society. It is very difficult to believe that the change in its leadership will affect its strength," Youssri said.

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Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

"The Mahdist regime is no more. Fate has wrought its ultimate doom." Thus commented *Al-Ahram* on 2 September 1898, sounding the conclusion of the Battle of Karari in the vicinity of Omdurman.

The newspaper had covered the momentous battle closely. On the Egyptian side: "The cavalry stretched endlessly into the desert dust. The 15th Regiment was pitched for battle, ready for the signal to engage the enemy at any moment. They were flanked by the artillery, while the British cavalry and the camel cavalry were in the vanguard." As for the Mahdist forces: "They approached in formation. Their front lines must have been three or four miles long. They were made up of infantry and cavalry of incalculable numbers, with banners raised and singing battle chants."

At 6.40am, the Egyptian artillery opened fire. "The 'devishers', as the newspaper termed the Mahdist forces, paraded with rifle fire and charged against the core of the Egyptian army. Their cavalry tried to dodge the hail of artillery mortar, but their efforts were futile. Their forces were pulverised, leaving the battlefield coated with their dead. The valour and courage of these devishers cannot be denied. Afterwards, our army marched forward, killing thousands more of the enemy forces until it arrived at the gates of Omdurman."

The Mahdist forces made a last-ditch effort to strike at the advance forces of the Egyptian army as they approached the city. When this failed, *Al-Ahram* continues, "They planted their banners in the ground, unwilling to accept any fate but death. The sight of the slaughter was beyond the capacity of human nerves to bear. The remnants scattered, leaving the field covered with severed and fragmented corpses."

The battle, with its tragic death toll, did not bring the final fall of the first independent government in Sudan. Nor did it mark the beginning of the end. This occurred nine months previously, and it was not well received by *Al-Ahram*.

The decision to send the expedition to Sudan was taken by the British high commissioner in Egypt in consultation with the Foreign Office in London. The Egyptian government was not party to the consultations; it was simply notified.

When, on 10 January 1898, the Egyptians learned of Lord Cromer's plans, it was only natural, after nearly two decades of British occupation, that they would be apprehensive. On 13 January, an interview between *Al-Ahram's* Cairo correspondent and "a British official" reflected the general reaction. In the article, entitled "The Expedition", the correspondent voiced the commonly felt suspicion that the only ultimate aim of bringing British troops in, allegedly to defend Egypt's southern borders from Mahdist incursions was to serve Britain's higher interests. "After all, is there any real need for such an expedition if our forces are well ensconced in Berber and other strongholds?" he asks. He concludes, embittered by the barely veiled de-

ception, "We hold the keys to placing Sudan in their hands, and our soldiers, money and ships will be pressed into serving British interests — is that not a calamity?"

It was not the prospects of war that aroused Egyptian opinion. On the contrary, Egyptians were inspired by Prime Minister Sherif Pasha's famous pronouncement at the time the British ordered the evacuation of Egyptian forces, "We may have had to leave Sudan, but Sudan will not leave us!" Rather, if the British took part in the campaign, Egypt feared, they would lay stake to the proceeds.

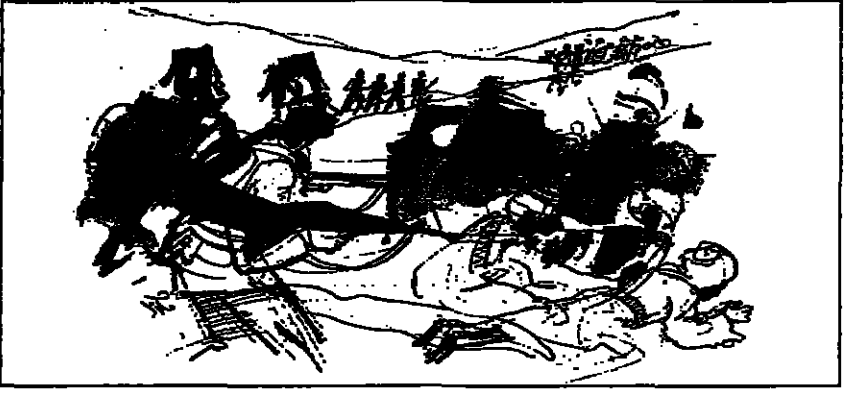
This put the newspaper in an awkward position. For while it rejected British control over the administration of the expedition, it could not deny its achievement in the field. In reading the newspaper's coverage of the war, one cannot help but notice the formula it derived to solve the conundrum. Following the expedition's victory at Atbara on 6 April, *Al-Ahram* wrote, "One cannot but praise our Egyptian-Sudanese forces just as we praise the British forces. Their outstanding performance of their duties in attack and defence were invaluable to that victory." Two days later, under the headline, "We may have had to leave Sudan, but Sudan will not leave us," the newspaper commented, "We are not surprised by the recent victory of our troops, for Egyptians, alone conquered Sudan."

To *Al-Ahram*, therefore, military conquests represented the victory "of Egyptian civilisation over the savage Mahdist regime in Sudan". It is small wonder that it would emphasise the role played by the Egyptian forces. Not infrequently, therefore, the newspaper challenged reports in the British press. For example, on 14 January 1898, Bishara Tagh, *Al-Ahram's* owner and editor-in-chief, was incensed by a *Morning Post* article which claimed that the British commander-general of the armed forces had little confidence in the fighting abilities of the Egyptian peasant, in contrast to the black slaves. "This betrays what the British really feel toward the Egyptian people, in spite of the fact, that as everyone far and wide has seen, the performance of the Egyptian fighting men has been outstanding, to which the commander-general himself has attested. Is it just, therefore, to deprive Egypt of its Sudanese possessions, to regain them using Egyptian men and money, and then, on top of that, to malign the Egyptian people with such calumny?"

At the same time, the newspaper belittled the role the British presumed to play in the expedition. The only possible reason was to convince the Egyptians that the British were vital to the war effort, thus acquiring stronger grounds to intervene in the pursuit of their own ulterior objectives. This was certainly the intention of the *Al-Ahram* author who wrote, "When one sees the momentous preparations under way for the Sudan expedition, the mobilisation of British and Egyptian troops far beyond the numbers that had been set, one imagines

121

The 1898 Anglo-Egyptian military expedition that brought down the Mahdist regime in Sudan was ostensibly a joint venture freely undertaken by the two sides in agreement. But this was not the case in reality. Britain, which had been occupying Egypt since 1882, unilaterally decided to launch the expedition and simply ordered Egypt to go along and mobilise its army. In this instalment of his chronicles of Egyptian life based on reports published by *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells the story of the expedition



that we are on our way to fight a powerful nation with an organised army. Whereas in fact we are sending a fully equipped army of 30,000 to fight a band of barbarians."

Al-Ahram takes other opportunities to belittle the efficacy of the Mahdist military machine. They are poorly equipped and the mortars they used at Egyptian fortifications fail to explode. Also, it argues, it is inconceivable that an army under the command of an individual prone to fantasy and superstition could possibly score a victory against a superior modern army. The newspaper relates that Al-Taishi, the successor to the Mahdi, took his men to a stone covered area at the junction of the White and Blue Niles. He tells them that he has received a prophecy: "Every stone here represents a British or Egyptian skull," he is reported as saying, suggesting that the numbers of British and Egyptian soldiers they will kill in battle would be incalculable. Although the story has been confirmed by other sources, *Al-Ahram's* objective was to say that such an army under such a commander could not be taken seriously.

Al-Ahram's patriotism was echoed by other newspapers of the era, notably by *Al-Mu'ayyid*, the other nationalist mouthpiece, owned and operated by Sheikh Ali Youssef. It was a patriotism that directed itself against other issues related to the expedition. Specifically, it was concerned with the size of the British contribution, and the expenses exacted from the Egyptian treasury to support that contribution. Particularly vexing was the fact that the

British authorities declared a news blackout on war preparations that applied only to the Egyptian press. Representatives of Reuters faced no such impediments and one correspondent of a British newspaper would gain considerable fame from his coverage. This was Mr. Winston Churchill who later published his reports in his well-known work, *The River War*.

"It is inappropriate that the government suppress from the Egyptian newspapers information of the events that are occurring in Sudan, at the southern gateway to Egypt," *Al-Ahram* protested. Yet, it had no alternative but to carry reports from the British press, volunteering comment where necessary.

However, there was certainly no problem when it came to playing up the prominent role the British would play. *Al-Ahram*, for example, could cover the parades and the pedestrian-lined streets to send-off of the British troops headed by train southward. One such report, dated 2 March, reads, "At 9am, a Highlanders battalion, whose members had been staying at the Qasr Al-Nil barracks, departed for Sudan. They were seen off at the train station by Commander Henderson and a throng of British well-wishers. The 800-member regiment marched to the train station in front of cheering crowds filling the balconies of the hotels they passed." Elsewhere, members of old British families participating in the war effort received special publicity. "The British forces count among them the sons of many eminent British dignitaries such as the Lords Salis-

bury, Derby and Robertson." Egyptian troops heading off to war received no such fanfare, let alone individual mention. Also, in spite of the rules of secrecy that normally prevail in wartime, these did not apply in the case of the details of the size of the British regiments headed south. On the one hand, officials were confident that Al-Taishi would not receive such intelligence, because of the poor communications system at his disposal. More important, however, was to implant in the minds of all, and particularly Egyptians, the extent of the contribution of Her Imperial Majesty's forces, even if that contradicted reality.

The process of raising the funds for this massive endeavour also provoked nationalist ire. In the course of 1898, the Egyptian government put state land and waqf (religious endowments) land up for sale and froze allocations to certain government projects, such as the Cairo sewer system project that had only recently begun. In spite of the funds it managed to put together, it still needed 800,000 pounds. The Egyptian government, as was customary under such circumstances, applied to the Debt Fund for access to a portion of the reserves that were administered by a tri-partite committee representing France, Russia and the UK for the repayment of Egypt's foreign debt. The French and Russian refusal should have, on the surface, impeded Britain's plans in the Nile Valley. Ultimately, however, it worked to Britain's advantage, providing them with another pretext, this time economic, to stake a claim in the proceeds of victory.

On June 27, in an unexpected move, the British Ministry of Finance submitted a proposal to the House of Commons to dissolve Egypt's debt to the UK. The proposal was approved by 156 to 81 votes. The British press, quoted in *Al-Ahram*, made no effort to conceal the purpose of this unprecedented magnanimity. The *London Times* commented, "This act will strengthen our position in the upper Nile, which is the object of the aspirations of rival nations." With this money, writes the *Daily Chronicle*, "We have swallowed a great Sultanate in one bite." As for the *Daily Graphic*, it wrote, "Making this concession to Egypt is an honour that bolsters our position there."

Egyptians were naturally skeptical of such generosity. "It is a glittering snare set to capture this aimless bird which they call Egypt," scoffs *Al-Ahram*. In fact, so unnerved was *Al-Ahram* by the potential consequences of the British "gift", that it departed from its customary reserve to declaim, "We can no longer expect the free dispensation of justice, unfettered by base, self-serving political and economic interests in this corrupt and licentious age!"

It would not be long before *Al-Ahram's* predictions, shared by all fervent nationalists of the age, would prove true. Within four days of the Battle of Karari, news arrived from the south that the British and Egyptian flags had been planted

side by side in Khartoum. The uproar in the press was tumultuous, as Egypt's leading newspapers voiced a cacophony of divergent opinions.

The British occupation's Arabic language mouthpiece, *Al-Muqattam*, wrote, "Egypt's alliance with Great Britain is to our advantage. Also, Russia's and France's opposition on the financial issue has bestowed some rights to England in Sudan."

Al-Mu'ayyid, mouthpiece for the nationalist movement, said, "The raising of the Egyptian and British flags in Khartoum has no greater significance beyond the custom of victorious armies to hoist their flags on the lands they conquer."

As for *Al-Ahram*, its interpretation was more ominous: "We face a grave situation, if raising both flags was not an accident. For we were given to understand that the money they had loaned us was then bestowed upon us as a gift and that their soldiers had come to help our soldiers in the reconquest, not as partners or allies to claim half the spoils." The newspaper further cautioned the Egyptian government that any leniency toward the British in this regard would constitute a crime against the people of Egypt. "Most matters brought before rulers can be examined in two lights, with the exception of this situation, which is a scandal and a stigma on anyone accepting it."

Popular sentiment was equally discordant. As *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Cairo reports, "The capital is practically quaking from the din of the thousands upon thousands of people of every class talking about the future of Sudan. The clamour was like a tidal wave." The author quotes some of the arguments that were circulating in the street. "England is the one who called for the expedition against Sudan, after she snatched it away from Egypt," says one individual. Another said, "She mounted the expedition so she could evade European demands to evacuate Egypt."

It is interesting that British authorities remained silent at this juncture. Clearly Britain sensed that the situation was explosive both at home and abroad. As *Al-Ahram* reminds them, "If Great Britain has forgotten her promises, Europe is there to remind her. By Europe we mean France and Russia, because Germany has chosen to remain neutral on the Egyptian question." Evidently, Egyptians had their hopes pinned primarily on the French, then in Fashoda, in the upper Nile region. Certainly their presence at the remote spot on the upper reaches of the Nile would revive the Egyptian question. However, that is another story closely followed by *Al-Ahram*.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

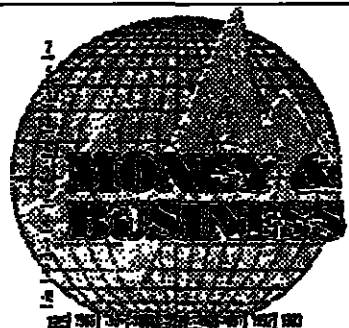


35 companies gain approval

THE COMPANIES' Committee at the Ministry of Economy, headed by Ahmed Fuad Atta, first undersecretary of the Ministry of Economy, approved the establishment of 35 new companies from 24-29 February, of which 17 are joint stock companies. Total authorised capital of these companies amounts to LE963mn, while their issued capital amounts to LE372.9mn.

Eighteen companies are limited liability ventures, 12 of these companies operate in the contracting field, 8 in trade, 7 in tourism and the 4 other companies in the industrial field.

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NBE: A leading role in financing infrastructure projects

THE STRUCTURAL changes characterising Egyptian society throughout this phase, especially after the successful implementation of the economic reform programme, have paved the way for an economic revival and healthy growth in an environment favourable for courting investors and creating new job opportunities.

Undoubtedly, a robust infrastructure is an essential asset for attracting investments and enhancing success and profitability. To this end, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has adopted an aggressive programme geared towards financing capital-intensive infrastructure projects in local and foreign currencies. The said projects encompass electric power stations, toll-paying highways, telephone cables, water stations, private industrial cities, technology projects, satellites, means of communication, in addition to cargo, air, road and maritime transportation projects.

Accordingly, the bank participated in establishing El-Montazah Company for Water Desalination (located in Sharm Al-Sheikh), with a view to desalinating the sea water inside and outside South Sinai Govern-

orate. This is in addition to producing fresh water to be bottled and sold to hotels and tourist villages besides other activities related to water desalination. It is noteworthy that NBE's Investment Trustee Department acts as the trustee of the founders of the company, whose capital totals

LE10mn distributed among 100,000 shares.

The company is envisaged to provide this vital area with fresh water, thus encouraging tourist and construction expansion in Sinai, which will positively influence the national economy.

It is worth mentioning that NBE has previously

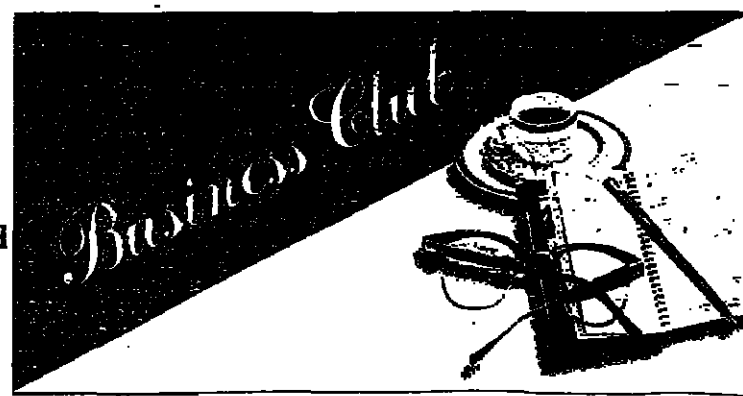
participated in the Riviera Project in Tabia, whose capital amounts to LE100mn. The bank also plans to boost its contribution to tourist, real estate and infrastructure development as well as to the establishment of tourist villages, hotels, restaurants, sports units and integrated services.

In fact, the above mentioned services square with the bank's comprehensive strategy conducive to adopting the concept of universal banking by rendering the services of commercial and investment banks so as to enhance the bank's competitive edge domestically and abroad.

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Valuing India

India lifts up its sari and scurries to catch up with the Asian tigers, dragging along its privatisation plans, writes **Garnal Nkrumah** from New Delhi

Privatisation is not all about pocketbook topics such as tax incentives and a liberalised investment code. Transport and telecommunications, too, invigorate privatisation and induce economic deregulation precisely because they permeate all aspects of life. Talking about life, there is nothing that quite matches the exhilarating experience of beholding India's Taj Mahal.

Arriving in India from the land of the pyramids, I never thought that any other architectural masterpiece could befuddle my emotions. But the story and splendour of the Dream in Marble, as the Taj Mahal is popularly known, did. In an ideal world, I would have been whisked away on a tourist bus for a comfortable two-hour drive to Agra, the city that houses India's most celebrated building. Instead I had to endure a terrible journey of four or five hours. The distance between Delhi and Agra is a mere 200 kilometres.

I was rather taken aback on the trip to Agra. To begin with, nobody knew for sure how long the journey would take. I was puzzled and was told time and again that "it all depends". Potholes gave the secret away. There was no dual carriage-way between Delhi and Agra. The bumpy, barely two-lane road told the sorry tale. Rail travel in the vast Indian sub-continent is good and is getting better. But privatisation can only really take off if air and road travel within India improve.

The point was driven home when, a day later, I spoke with economists and entrepreneurs at the influential Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry. "Unless the government prepares a transparent policy statement on the key infrastructure areas such as power, ports and roads, foreign investment will not flow in," warned Y P Srivastava, a senior economist there.

India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at the impressive rate of 5.3 per cent in 1994-95, splendid by Western standards but poor by East Asian ones. The industrial sector of the Indian economy is the fastest growing at 9.5 per cent a year. Within it, the capital goods sector is a high flyer with an annual growth rate of 22 per cent.

The World Bank estimates that government expenditure must be reduced by three to four per cent. India is a largely rural country. Some 75 per cent of Indians live in rural areas and the remainder — 225 million — live in urban centres. Today, most Indian companies are small by international standards, though Indian Oil Corporation featured in America's *Fortune Magazine's* list of 500 giant companies. Foreign firms are eyeing the larger and more profitable Indian companies and there might be rich pickings for them in the next few years.

India is a very large market with a middle class of around 250 million — roughly equal to the population of the United States. Nonetheless, about 350 million rural poor in India cannot afford to buy brand-name goods — and that worries Western multinationals. India, with its 930 million people, is a huge market, but its economy was until recently based on import substitution; luxury cars, cellular phones and modern music systems are not permitted into the country. Moreover, Kellogg's Corn Flakes and Kentucky Fried Chicken are finding it very difficult to penetrate the Indian market as Indians largely loathe modifying their eating habits and are most particular about food.

Last November, India's Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, interviewed by the London-based *Financial Times*, confessed, "We need to invest about 10 per cent of our GDP in basic physical infrastructure. We are investing today about 6-6.5 per cent. In years to come, we should do more."

And what about India's industrialists? "When we began [the deregulation] process, there was a large-scale fear that import liberalisation and removal of quantitative import restrictions would lead to the de-industrialisation of India. The prophets of doom and gloom have fortunately been proved wrong. Our capital goods industry is booming. Also, our imports of capital goods are proving a supplement rather than a substitute," Manmohan Singh assured.

But India's industrialists are not impressed with the government's interim budget which was presented by Manmohan Singh last week. "The rise in the fiscal deficit is one of the areas on which the government should focus immediately and this can be achieved only by curbing government expenditure. The buoyancy in revenue collections have been offset by negative savings by the government," Manish Roy, spokeswoman for the Confederation of Indian Industry, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Public sector disinvestment has been

able to fetch in only \$76 million of the projected \$2 billion."

Manmohan Singh, India's chief architect of economic reform, put it in a nutshell: "Economic reforms never take place in a political vacuum. Fiscal reforms are everywhere intensely political because reducing expenditure means hurting certain entrenched interests."

Many Indians feel that the economic reforms do not benefit the poor. The world's first democratically elected communist government was installed 40 years ago in the southern Indian state of Kerala. To their credit, the communists wiped out illiteracy in Kerala while the national average hovers around 55 per cent. According to recent opinion polls, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is expected to win the April elections in Kerala. Today, the communists control the populous and industrial state of West Bengal and the tiny eastern state of Tripura as well.

Surjit Singh, the head of the CPI(M), told the *Weekly*, "Economic liberalisation has unleashed a shocking level of corruption. It has become institutionalised and is brazenly practised." Surjit Singh voiced concerns that there was no evidence of a trickle-down effect from the deregulation programmes.

"Liberalisation has resulted in a bonanza for foreign capital and big Indian business. In the name of stimulating growth, the corporate sector has been given big tax concessions and foreign companies have been given more facilities than Indian firms," he warned. "The benefits of these pernicious policies have accrued to the urban and rural rich. The whole policy is geared to meet the needs of the top 10 per cent of the population and the market they provide."

There are those who want to improve the performance of the state-owned enterprises first, before selling them off. And there are those who think that state enterprises should not be up for sale. "Of the 140 state-owned firms [in Kerala], 32 made profits in 1995 against 13 in 1991," said Amithabh Kant, head of Kerala State Industries Development Corporation, recently. Kerala's economy last year grew at an impressive 41 per cent — far ahead of the national average of six per cent, said Kant. He added that the southern state planned to attract investment worth some \$6.25 billion by the turn of the century.

At a national level, the government can only reduce its public debt by investing less in the public sector. Government expenditure in 1996 is projected at \$57.21 billion. The forthcoming elections in April might be tempting the various ministries to increase social spending and thereby win more votes. Proposed infrastructural programmes are often obstructed in favour of more popular short-term social programmes.

The fiscal deficit, originally budgeted at \$16 billion at a rate of 5.5 per cent of GDP, has risen to \$18.2 billion or 5.9 per cent of GDP. The public sector deficit stood at 8.5 per cent just before Manmohan Singh became finance minister four years ago. By 1994 it was 6.7 per cent and it dropped further in 1995 to 5.5 per cent. Economic reforms also mean that inflation is down to 8.5 per cent.

V Raghuraman, secretary-general of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry, recently warned that deregulation and economic reforms might mean the country ends up with spiralling prices and galloping inflation, a dramatic increase in fiscal deficit and ultimately economic recession. "Once the administered prices of the government are revised, inflation will return with a bang and the whole mathematics will go haywire," Raghuraman said.

But there are some benefits to be gained from the reforms, all concede. "Among emerging markets, it is currently Brazil and India which are attracting the maximum interest. The general view is that the Indian market is currently underpriced," said London Stock Exchange Deputy Chairman Ian Slater, who was in Delhi recently.

"The Indian market fell significantly last year despite the rise in corporate profits by well over 40 per cent. And even though no fund manager really buys at the trough and sells at the peak, the view now is that the Indian market is a very good place to invest in from the long-term point of view," he enthused.

"Even if I feel that the rupee is going to depreciate by a certain percentage, as long as the market rises by a higher percentage and the net gain is more than what I think, other comparable markets will offer, why should I hesitate to invest in India?"



S. Krishnan, a devotee and herbal treasurer at the Siddha Samaj ashram, at Vatakara in India's southern state of Kerala. Ashram inmates make and sell ayurvedic medicine, India's traditional herbal medicine, to fund a religious lifestyle of vegetarian diets and yoga exercises (photo:Reuters)

Bombay ahoy

India: Fact file

Area	3,287,263 sq Km
Population	930million
Currency	Rupee(Rs)
Average exchange rate, 1994/95	\$1= Rs 31.4
Economy	1995/96
GDP (Rs billion)	10,478.9
Real GDP growth (%)	4.7
Inflation (%)	8.5
Export growth (%)	29

Distinguished members of the Alexandria Businessmen Association (ABA) visited India from 28 February to 5 March. Mohamed Ragab, chairman of the ABA, is heading the delegation.

The purpose of the visit is to explore new opportunities for bilateral trade and industrial joint ventures and to further strengthen relations between the business communities in the two countries.

Both India and Egypt have embarked on radical economic reform programmes launched at the beginning of the decade.

The Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) is coordinating the visit. ABA members are to tour three major Indian cities: the capital Delhi, the chief port Bombay and the southern industrial metropolis of Bangalore.

The CII and ABA are to sign a memorandum of understanding during the visit. The ABA delegation will also hold discussions with several ministers and senior Indian

politicians, prominent business houses and export promotion councils.

Last December, the Indian Ambassador to Egypt, Kanwal Sibal, delivered a lecture at the ABA headquarters in Alexandria in which he outlined the progress of India's economic liberalisation and deregulation programme. Ambassador Sibal expressed the hope that Egyptian entrepreneurs consider seriously investing in joint ventures with Indian firms and explore business opportunities in India.

Last week Ambassador Sibal said that the ABA visit was the first by such a high-powered business delegation from Egypt.

He attributed this rejuvenated interest to the highly successful visit of the Indian Prime Minister, P V Narasimha Rao, to Egypt last year. Sibal stated that the visit would be linked to the bilateral joint commission session, scheduled to take place in New Delhi in the near future.

Within Saharan wastes

Five years of ethnic conflict in Mali are over. But can development be sustained in the country's northern sandy wastes, asks **Abouali Farmanfarmaian** in Leré

A bone-rattling eight-hour drive north of Mali's relatively green capital, Bamako, the desert village of Leré, encapsulates the problems that face Mali's new-born peace. Above the River Niger, a few miles of rice fields irrigated by the Markala Canal abruptly disappear into the savannah which itself fades into the Sahel. This is where the real "north" begins, arching across the top of Mali from Leré to Timbuktu to Gao in a territory mainly marked by sand and wind.

Once a busy village of 10,000 traders and herders, Leré's market is now bare and there is almost no livestock to be seen on its dusty streets. Actually, there are almost no people about. Over the five years of the Tuareg rebellion, the population dwindled to a third of its original size as Arabs and Tuareg fled to refugee camps across the border in Mauritania. "Up to a few months ago," confides a soldier stationed in Leré, "there were no Arabs or Tuareg around."

Although a thousand refugees have wearily returned to pick up the pieces of the lives they left behind, there is still an eerie calm in the village. Lying around under the thatched awnings of their homes, the robbed returnees silently escape a pitiless sun; there is little else to do here these days.

"When I came back," says Ali ag Mohamed Ali, a young Tuareg refugee who recently returned from a camp in Mauritania, "I saw that the roof of our house was destroyed and the walls were cracked. I repaired the house and now I am just waiting for my family to join me here. But I don't know what we'll do when they come."

Like many other refugees, Ali's family lost their animals to bandits and, apart from the four mud walls of their compound and the shirts on their backs, they possess little. For three years they have been surviving thanks to provisions given out at refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Now they must make their own and they do not quite know what route to take or what options they have.

Agriculture is virtually impossible here. Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are starting herding projects to try to give families a few "start-up animals" and help them increase the size and uses of the herds. Other than that, life will hardly mean survival from the seven wells in the area. Ali says though all these ideas are finally coming to what he hopes will be the most attractive, working with NGOs on development projects.

A number of the French-speaking youth are already working with the handful of NGOs currently operating around Leré, but in a new culture of dependency that some aid workers say has been brought back from the refugee camps, everyone in the north, from refugees to rebel leaders, is pinning their hopes on "les projets", with their monthly cash and flashy jeeps.

When the war broke out in 1990, about \$200 million worth of international development money was frozen. With the return of peace there is talk that these funds will be released again. And to add colour to the dreams, it is understood that a great chunk of Mali's development projects will be carried out in the north.

"This is the medium-term solution," says Torre Rose of the UN Development Programme. "We have to make things happen here. We have to show that life can be normal again."

But Rose has fears about the future. "In the long term," he warns, "the carrying capacity of the north is the question: is it a sustainable place for a million people to live in?"

A number of ex-refugees are not waiting for the answer and have come up with a short-term solution of their own. They have pulled out of their movements, kept their arms and taken up banditry. Just two weeks ago, masked and armed men broke into the UNHCR compound in Leré and stole the new Toyota Land Cruiser that had been fixed the night before. They were quickly identified as the band of a rebel leader's former driver. They can sell the jeep in Mauritania, just 40 kilometres away, from Leré, for the tidy sum of \$35,000. For now, this makes cash hand-outs, well-diggings and herding projects pale in comparison.

Minority right or racist fight?

As South Africa approaches the promulgation of its new multi-racial constitution in June this year, the recent racially oriented disputes show that the country is still grappling with the whole concept of multiculturalism. The recent disputes revolved around the admission of rural black children into predominantly white public schools in neighbouring towns. The scenario raises classic post-colonial questions pertaining to the protection of minority rights and interests.

The rural areas of South Africa are characterised by two different types of settlement: vast impoverished rural black communities, on the one hand, and towns predominantly occupied by white Afrikaners, on the other. This peculiar situation was part of the apartheid government's policy of racial segregation: the confinement of black South Africans to rural backwaters, called "homelands", acted as a justification for their alienation in the "white areas". The Afrikaners who occupy the towns are mostly descendants of Dutch settlers and have been the most vociferous propagators of apartheid policies in the past.

Today the racism of yesteryear still lingers. Last month the legacy of the past was brought to the fore. In the Northern Province town of Potgietersrus, a recently

Recent disputes over schooling in South Africa have shown that some Afrikaners are trying to use minority rights as a tool to maintain a segregated education system that formed a pillar of the apartheid system, warns **Sophia Christoforakis**

relocated black official in the provincial water department tried to enrol his children into the local state school. The school denied them access and went as far as using armed men to stop the children from entering the school.

A week later, a court declared the school's behaviour unconstitutional. The Northern Province government filed a suit against Afrikaner parents who had barred the children from the school. On 22 February, 16 black pupils were escorted to the school by the police and a truck-load of Afrikaners, while the army stood by in riot uniform. Only a handful of white students showed up for lessons. Most white parents had kept their children at home in protest and a dozen of them had made their way to the school gates to hurl abuse.

But Chula Thabang, a 10-year-old black pupil, was not perturbed. As she entered the school gates she turned and addressed the cameras. "I'm glad to be here," she said. "I'm confident that the teachers will treat us like other children. If they don't, I will raise my hand. And if they treat us badly I will tell the government and they

won't give them any money and will close the school."

A few days later, a similar incident occurred in another rural South African town — Trompsburg in the Orange Free State. Inspired by the Potgietersrus incident, black pupils from the rural outskirts of Trompsburg went to the local state school to claim empty classrooms promised to them earlier this year by local authorities.

Scores of Afrikaner men armed with clubs refused to allow the pupils into the school. The 400 black pupils who went to claim the classrooms went on a rampage, setting fire to a house and looting shops in the vicinity. The tension remains unresolved. Black community leaders have called for a stay-away protest, which involves not working or shopping in the town. Trompsburg's businessmen have said that such an action would probably cripple them.

The incidents bear many similarities to the infamous 1976 Soweto riots. In the riots, school children took it upon themselves to condemn the inferior educational system apartheid allotted to blacks. The

primary bone of contention was that the Afrikaners language was a compulsory subject in black schools. In the incidents of the last few weeks, the debate has centred on the teaching of Afrikaners and the preservation of the Afrikaner culture. White parents in Potgietersrus initially said that the black pupils did not speak Afrikaners sufficiently well and would consequently hinder the teaching of the other pupils. They then accused the authorities of seeking to impose tuition in English.

The chairman of the Potgietersrus school board, who led the white parents opposing the integration, sees his duty as opposing the importation of "alien cultures" into his children's lives. As one parent said, "It's not about these [black] children. It's about a principle. In a few years there will be hundreds, maybe thousands, of blacks here and then it will no longer be a predominantly Afrikaner school."

Such arguments should rightfully not hold in the "New South Africa", but President Nelson Mandela is playing a delicate balancing game when it comes to Afrikaner nationalism. In comparison to other set-

ters, the Afrikaners were initially much more integrated with the local population. In some rural areas of South Africa you can still find old Afrikaners who can speak formal versions of the local languages that are rarely spoken in the urban areas. Pro-segregationist Afrikaner nationalism sprang up after the great depression. Afrikaners suddenly saw their black counterparts as competitors for the few jobs available at that time. This sentiment ultimately led to the creation of the Nationalist Party and its policy of "apartheid": blacks and whites living supposedly separate but equal lifestyles.

One of the most difficult things that had to be negotiated for the post-apartheid dispensation was the demilitarisation of Afrikaner nationalists. Violent Afrikaners threatened to derail the first free elections in 1994, when they bombed the international airport in Johannesburg. Mandela finally appeased the Afrikaner nationalists by promising to recognise and maintain minority rights pertaining to language, culture and religion.

Following the latest incidents Mandela's

government promised the Afrikaners the possibility of an alternative form of education to the state system. This might include separating English and Afrikaners within individual schools or establishing private Afrikaner schools on existing state school grounds with government assistance. Compensation might also be paid to Afrikaner parents to enable them to establish separate private Afrikaner schools.

The Bantu Education Act, promulgated during the apartheid period, formed the basis of segregated schooling in South Africa. Under apartheid rule, the government spent up to five times more on white than on black education. Now, as then, rural black schools in the country face a crisis in resources, making the proposed concession to the Afrikaners seem preposterous.

The local elections last year, in which the black rural community and the white town community voted in the same ward, gave Potgietersrus its first black mayor. The new black mayor is faced with the tricky situation of weighing up the impoverished black rural community's claims to "minority rights". Afrikaners are falling into the classic post-colonial settler pattern. Having abandoned the gun, racism is now being articulated in the courtroom under the guise of "minority rights".

Spanish change of guard

Spain's Popular Party leader, Jose Maria Aznar's victory leaves the door ajar for the right to make impressive inroads into the European political scene, writes **Sayed Awad**



Supporters of the winning conservative Popular Party hold banners of the party's leader, Jose Maria Aznar, during Sunday's Spanish general elections (Photo AFP)

The centre-right Popular Party's (PP) victory in last Sunday's Spanish general elections was much slimmer than expected. The conservative Popular Party gained 156 seats in the 350-seat parliament with 38.85 per cent of the vote — less than two points ahead of Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez's Socialist Workers' Party, which won 141 seats. The pro-communist Izquierda Unida came third with 10.58 per cent of the vote.

The PP, 20 seats short of an absolute majority, now has to negotiate with regional parties to form a coalition government. These in-

clude the Catalan Convergence and Union party, which Aznar has been criticising for years for supporting Gonzalez. Aznar might also cut a deal with moderate nationalists from the Basque country and the Canary Islands.

The election results ushered in a radically new phase in Spanish politics. No longer do the Socialists dominate the Spanish political scene. However, it is important to note that the shift away from the left does not necessarily mean that Spaniards are now decidedly right-leaning.

What the election results indicate is that the Spanish voters are fed up with the mal-

administration that has become synonymous with Socialist rule. The Socialists, in power for 13 years, were battered by a wave of corruption scandals in recent years. It is not surprising then that the Socialists have been relegated to the back benches. Their poor election showing is a far cry from their clean sweep of the polls in 1982.

Spain's population of some 40 million is still among Western Europe's poorest. Moreover, Spain has the European Union's highest unemployment rate — 23 per cent. The Socialists' policies clashed with the interests of a large sec-

tion of the Spanish population. Their economic austerity measures in particular alienated them from their traditional working-class supporters. The rise in unemployment rates, the laying off of workers, wage reductions and the loss of social security benefits all contributed to the Socialists' demise.

Aznar, a 43-year-old former tax inspector, has pledged a clean slate, job creation, pension security and a tax cut, while paying lip service to the deficit-reduction criteria Spain must satisfy to qualify as a founding member of a single European currency.

Talking with the enemy

Meetings designed to revive the Northern Ireland peace process and pave the way for all-party talks were again under way this week. They follow an announcement last week by the British and Irish governments that the long-awaited all-party negotiations would begin on 10 June.

The prospects of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) declaring a return to its ceasefire seemed stronger after Sinn Fein — the IRA's political wing — extended a "cautious welcome" to the Anglo-Irish decision. John Hume, leader of the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), expressed his belief that a new ceasefire declaration was imminent. The IRA broke off its 17-month truce on 9 February, bombing an office building in London on the same day.

But the joint peace formula announced by British Prime Minister John Major and his Irish counterpart John Bruton after the London summit last week made it clear that Sinn Fein is barred from ministerial-level meetings until the IRA announces a new ceasefire. Sinn Fein is still allowed to attend lower-level discussions with officials.

This week's talks are due to last until 13 March. Their aim is to reach "widespread agreement on proposals for a broadly acceptable effective process leading directly and without preconditions to all-party negotiations on 10 June", said a joint statement.

Britain will talk to Sinn Fein, but London is not going to negotiate a deal until the Irish Republican Army agrees to a ceasefire, reports **Doaa El-Bay** from London

Polls will be held in Northern Ireland, possibly at the end of May, to set up a non-legislative, non-executive forum, from which the negotiating teams will be chosen.

The current meetings will consider whether a referendum should be held in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic at the time of the elections. The referendum — an idea proposed by John Hume — would ask people two questions: are you against violence as a means for a settlement, and are you in favour of all-party talks now?

Bruton appeared confident that, as a result of last week's agreement, Sinn Fein would ask the IRA to stop its campaign. "We do not believe that the IRA would wish to prevent the Sinn Fein electorate — an important electorate and an important point of view — from adequately participating in the [all-party] talks," he said.

SDLP member of parliament Joe Hendron told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he welcomed the Anglo-Irish agreement and was optimistic that the IRA would renew the ceasefire "in the next couple of weeks". The most important thing in the agreement, according to Hendron, is that it sets a fixed date for all the parties to abide

by. "This has always been the demand of Sinn Fein. Now that it is set, the IRA should reinstate the ceasefire," he said.

The IRA and Sinn Fein have not, however, given any further cause for optimism. "There is a need for absolute clarity on all aspects to re-establish the peace process," Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams said. He described the renewal of the IRA's cessation of violence as being most unlikely to occur in the next few days. Both Adams and Hume met with IRA leaders in secret during the Major-Bruton meeting and reportedly urged them to return to a ceasefire.

David Trimble, leader of Northern Ireland's biggest Protestant party, the Ulster Unionists, welcomed the joint peace plan made by the British and Irish governments, but affirmed that his party would not meet or talk face to face with Sinn Fein except after its clear commitment to a ceasefire.

Political commentators applauded the result of the Anglo-Irish summit and expressed relief that the issue of decommissioning — or disarming the IRA — was no longer Britain's top priority. The issue once eclipsed all others in the peace process, but has now been relegated to a stipulation that it be discussed at an early stage.

Decommissioning was such a big stumbling block that, when Major continued to insist on it, public support in Britain and Ireland began to slip away from him. A recent opinion poll in Ireland showed that 70 per cent of people there held the British government responsible for the ending of the IRA truce.

Commenting on Adams' declaration that he had asked the IRA to return to a ceasefire, Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis claimed that it was intended as mere propaganda. "Gerry Adams is not a great knight on a white horse who tries to entice terrorists away from guns," he said. "He is the chief propagandist for the IRA. One proof of this is that he is under the control of and accountable to the army council of the IRA. He is not a free agent."

Unionists were angered last week when US President Bill Clinton granted Adams a new three-month, multiple-entry visa. Yet many observers believe Clinton took the step in the hope that Adams would regain credibility within his own movement and, therefore, be able to orchestrate a new IRA ceasefire.

Unionists in Northern Ireland allege that the main obstacles to peace are the activities of Sinn Fein. Mag-

innis said, "Given that the loyalist paramilitaries have maintained their ceasefire, the only danger is from the IRA which got less than five per cent of the votes of the people in the 1994 elections. But because they cannot achieve their ends through political and diplomatic channels, they believe they reserve the right to switch on and switch off violence."

The Ulster Unionist Party is vehemently opposed to proposals by the SDLP and Ian Paisley's Democratic Ulster Party that the elections should be contested on a single constituency for the whole of Northern Ireland. Asked if this would be another obstacle to the whole peace process, Maginnis said that it should not be too big a problem.

The SDLP believes that the paramilitaries now have to join together in making peace. Party member Hendron told the *Weekly* that what was holding up the reconciliation process was that some parties would not talk to others and "keep running around like young children".

Small loyalist parties like the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) believe that it is the ceasefire which is the real problem. Billy Smith of the PUP told the *Weekly* that, without the IRA ceasefire and commitment to the democratic process, there could not be real peace in Ulster. "But a 'permanent' ceasefire that will be broken at the next impasse is not acceptable," he said.

The UNHCR last month tried to raise the profile of gender-based persecution. **Mariz Tadros** reviews the organisation's efforts to broaden the definition of women refugees

Women on the run

"Women who flee gender-based persecution, however small their number, should not be turned away from your borders or refused recognition as refugees. They are not a threat — they themselves are threatened — and humanity dictates that they receive protection and refugee status," said Wairimu Karago, deputy director of the Division of International Protection under the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Karago was addressing representatives of 16 Western countries in a symposium last month (22-24 February) at the UNHCR head office in Geneva.

"From UNHCR's perspective, I can say that if a woman flees after being brutally persecuted for transgressing certain strict social codes, she is a refugee... Women who are persecuted because of their refusal to comply with the indignity of certain social codes or who are given no choice but to mutilate their baby daughters or whose government fails to protect them from extreme violence and sexual torture" are also refugees if they flee, she said.

Ruth Marshall, public information officer at the UNHCR office in Geneva, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the two-day symposium and workshop was designed for Western countries which had a history of resettling refugees seeking asylum. "Since gender-based persecution has not been mainstreamed, the symposium was an attempt to bring it more into the general public's focus," she said. "Few countries have proper guidelines to deal with a situation where a woman would say to them, seeking asylum, 'I fear persecution for myself and my baby daughter because I have refused to genitaly mutilate her.'"

According to the 1951 UN convention and the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees, a refugee is defined as any person who is unable or unwilling to remain in or return to their homeland because of "a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social or political group". Nowhere is there recognition of persecution due to the transgression of oppressive and dangerous social mores and nowhere is there reference to gender persecution in the definition.

Asked why the UNHCR had not taken steps to ratify the convention to include women suffering from gender persecution, Marshall replied: "In an ideal world, we would... But any suggestion of ratification would put the whole definition in dispute. The feeling of the

UNHCR is that it would open up many debates especially amongst those dissatisfied with its current state. The final definition might actually be narrower rather than include many more refugee groups."

Whilst the European Union has recognised gender persecution as a legitimate basis for granting asylum, only Canada and the United States have set out clear guidelines establishing the criteria and circumstances in which women may be considered as refugees for transgressing social mores. "In our discussions, the US, for instance, discussed its own guidelines in which female genital mutilation is considered a form of gender persecution and women are granted asylum if their lives were threatened as a result of not abiding by it," explained Marshall. "In Canada, for instance, there is a policy where in cases of extreme domestic violence when no protection is provided by their government, women are eligible for asylum as refugees."

Marshall insists that the UNHCR does not expect a high increase in the number of women seeking asylum since, after the implementation of their new guidelines, the US and Canada only experienced a one per cent increase in their refugee intake. "It is important to note that the guidelines proposed by the UNHCR are not going to be enforced. It is up to each country to decide how it can make use of them," she said. She emphasised that refugee eligibility for these women will not hinge on the kind of social convention the female has transgressed nor on how unacceptable it is to the international community, but on the degree of persecution the woman is subjected to or fears as a consequence of her transgression.

Marshall pointed out that the UNHCR is not proposing refugee eligibility for "every woman who refuses to comply with certain cultural practices. For instance, not every woman who refuses to wear the veil should be granted asylum — only those who are persecuted. The same thing applies to rape victims. Canada will not be ac-

cepting every woman who asks for asylum status on the basis of rape, but only those who are raped and their governments don't or won't protect them."

How valid, though, is the cultural imperialism argument, namely that the West wants to impose what is acceptable and unacceptable culturally for women of other cultures? Marshall is very dismissive of its relevance, calling it "a dead issue". "The UN with its various divisions, including the World Health Organisation, has long taken a stand against this argument and condemns practices demeaning to women, even those protected under cultural banners," she said.

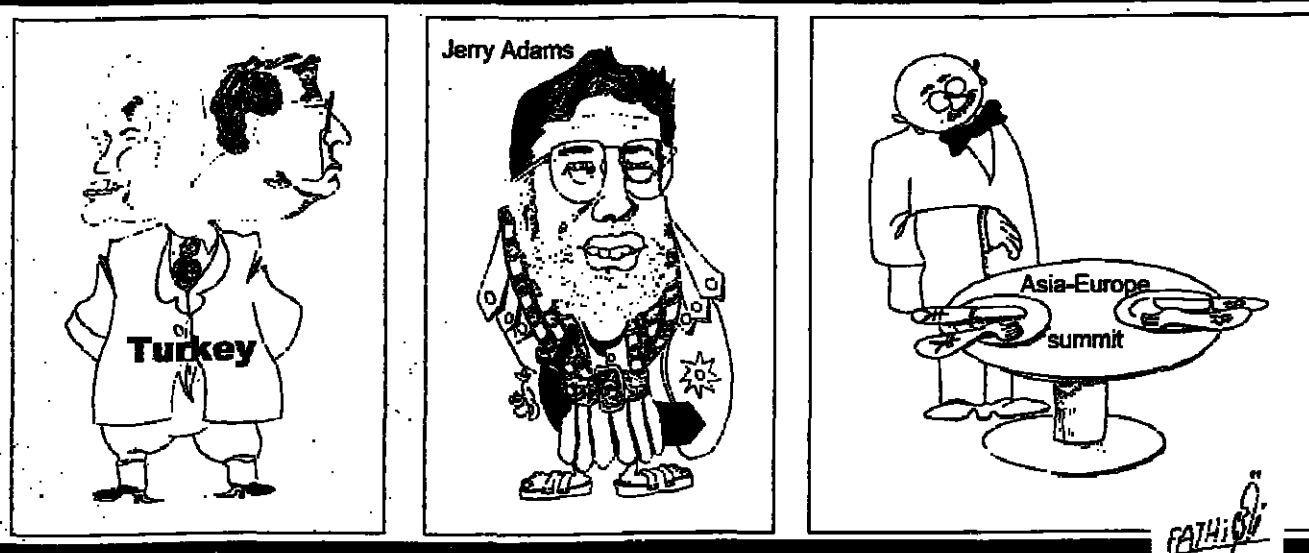
Marshall admitted that the UNHCR's reputation for the protection of refugees generally, and women in particular, was not inspiring. The organisation has been accused of serious gender insensitivity. One UNHCR agent cited a significant example: "Upon entering the tents, I found women who had been raped, women who were suffering from serious gynaecological problems and women who were pregnant. They had all sorts of problems but wouldn't cross the street to complain because the non-governmental organisations did not have any female doctors. The first lesson I learnt from this experience is the great necessity of having female personnel in the field."

The most serious gender persecution of wom-

en refugees occurs in camps before or during their resettlement. In a case study of Rwandan women following the 1994 war, a French foundation discovered that "practically all adult women and girls who had passed the age of puberty who survived the massacres were raped". Between 2,000 and 5,000 babies were born as a result of this.

New York-based Human Rights Watch suggested that "in host countries, local residents and even police, military and immigration officials often view refugee women as targets for assault. They subject refugee women to rape or other forms of sexual extortion in return for the granting of passage to safety, refugee status, personal documentation or relief supplies."

But it is not merely a question of recognising women at risk. The provision of resettlement opportunities for female refugees is urgently needed. "Due to the traumatic effects of their refugee experience, they will require special integration assistance from the sponsoring group. Many will have poor settlement prospects, perhaps because they are disadvantaged in terms of education, linguistic or employment skills or because their adjustment will be hampered by the presence of young children," Karago pointed out in her speech in Geneva. "The question is the quality of your protection of the world's refugees" — of which 80 per cent are women and children.



An American revolt

By **Eqbal Ahmad**

A striking feature of this season's presidential campaign in the United States is this: Bill Clinton, the incumbent and sole Democratic Party candidate sounds like a Republican. The Republican candidate Patrick Buchanan, an articulate dark horse who defeated Robert Dole in New Hampshire's traditionally bell-wether primary election, has appropriated the Democrats' slogans.

To foreigners who viewed the American party system from the vantage point of America's bi-partisan, Cold War foreign policy, the differences between the two parties appeared arcane and insignificant. "Sir, may I ask what is the difference between the Democratic and Republican parties?" an Indian student had asked in my first class in American politics at Princeton University. In response Professor Mason queried another student, a Kenyan, who saw the similarities: both are anti-communist, both support NATO, both are against China's admission into the UN, both proffer aid to underdeveloped countries, both are suspicious of the non-aligned nations, etc. Professor Mason nodded, then described the contrasts between the two parties. One was supported by middle-class liberals, labour and minorities; the other by capital, affluent classes and conservative sections of society. One was Keynesian in economic outlook, not averse to deficit spending and favoured government's intervention to ensure distributive justice through welfare programmes. The other trusted the free market to regulate distributive justice through its corrective mechanisms and rewards for hard work.

In the Cold War years of growing affluence at home and expanded American power abroad the differences between the two parties gradually eroded. Yet in the 1960s, the civil rights movement helped to re-demarcate political boundaries: the Democratic Party responded to the movement more sympathetically than the Republican. Most of the civil rights legislation, anti-poverty and affirmative action programmes of the sixties and seventies were enacted and enforced by Democratic governments, while the cutbacks on these programmes occurred in the Republican years — especially of Ronald Reagan and George Bush. The long Republican reign grossly exaggerated the patterns of inequality in America and reduced the margins of working people's hard-earned securities. The resulting discontent underlay the defeat of Bush by Clinton.

In office Clinton appeared more a nominee of multinationals than the choice of the people, and he forged international trade agreements opposed by labour. As a reaction neo-conservatives led by Newt Gingrich were returned to Congress. Ironically, this helped sharpen the contrast between the two parties. An example is the recent confrontation between the Clinton administration and the Congress over the budget. Gingrich's call to balance the budget did not include significant cuts in defence spending or aid to Israel; nor did Newt Gingrich want higher taxes on wealth in a country where income disparities have widened rather dramatically. He proposed instead to cut into the bare bones of the welfare state — the poverty programme, Medicare, housing subsidies and public education. To his credit, Bill Clinton stood his ground, a fact which may contribute greatly to his re-election in November.

This electoral campaign is blurring the ideological divide again, thanks mainly to Pat Buchanan's eccentric and, so far, astonishingly successful campaign. His victory in New Hampshire has shaken the Republican establishment and the media barons who are, with rare exception, obsessively anti-Buchanan. He is being portrayed as an anti-Semite and a racist belonging to the rightist fringe of the Republican Party. In truth, he is as Republican as dry Martin and Bloody Mary. He was a speech writer for Richard Nixon, an honour he shared with his Zionist-Republican buddy William Safire, now a hate-mongering anti-Arab columnist of the *New York Times*. Buchanan also served in the Reagan White House and was a featured speaker at the Republican convention in 1992. He has been a syndicated columnist and is a charter-member of the media establishment — as respectable as his detractors like Abe Rosenthal, also of the *New York Times*. In a recent column Abe demanded an apology from Pat for accusing Israel of pushing the US toward war in the Gulf: "Until he withdraws and apologises for that slur, Mr Buchanan is no candidate in my mind." Never mind that Rosenthal is the one who, also during the build-up to the Gulf War, called Islam a "hate civilisation" and never contemplated apologising. Buchanan's worst enemies today are his best friends of yesterday.

The negative campaign has failed so far to hurt Buchanan. For good reasons. He alone among the candidates is articulating the anxieties of the American people: the widening income gap between the rich and the middle class, the decline in employment opportunities, the strangulation of monopoly capitalism — read multinationals — on the economy, the globalisation of capital and, above all, that pervasive sense of pessimism about the future that must complement this state of affairs. While addressing the popular anxieties, the disheartened conservative sounds more like a leftist Democrat than a Republican. He rails against multinational corporations, denounces the free market and its symbols like GATT and the World Trade Organisation and its treaties such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. "What's going on over here?" he would ask and declaim: AT&T laid off 40,000 American workers, was praised for it and its stocks soared. He has supplied a new label to his well-worn American populism: "a new conservatism of the heart, not of the board room... not of those who sold the country out to the big corporations".

Straight radical talk from a mainstream Republican! Pat Buchanan has appropriated the Democratic message and people are applauding. Read the letters columns of any major daily and you will know why. Here are samples from the *New York Times* of 23 February. George Tyndall from Los Angeles reminds us that Clinton signed and Dole voted to ratify GATT in autumn 1995 and that "since then, of the 700,000 Americans employed in the garment industry, 100,000 have lost their jobs". William Schreiber from Cambridge, Massachusetts, writes: "None of the benefits of improvement in productivity for the past 20 years have gone to the lower 80 per cent of families."

He has other advantages: an excellent, volunteer-based organisation run on a shoestring budget — a problem he has turned to his advantage by casting himself as an underdog. More importantly, in a race of dumbbells Buchanan appears intelligent and eloquent. The main contender, Senator Robert Dole, is a master of banality. "Like everyone in this room," he said at one meeting, "I was born." On losing New Hampshire he was enlightened: "I did not realise that jobs and trade and what makes America work would become a big issue."

Other candidates are equally colourless. Billionaire Steve Forbes has outspent everyone, but runs a campaign of negatives and gimmicks such as promising everybody a 17 per cent flat tax. After an initial flight his campaign is starting to mire in boredom. Alexander Lamar, former governor of Tennessee, has offered the rudiments of a programme that addresses the public's concerns with promises of reform in education and a scheme to reduce illegal immigration. All of them are "half baked", as a *New York Times* editorial noted, "barely gone anywhere near an oven". Lamar may yet make it for he is a Republican regular — which Buchanan is no more — to whom the establishment will turn when the Dole option is exhausted. Buchanan is unlikely to be the Republican nominee. If he is, Clinton shall trounce him. For he arouses passion and fear among blacks, immigrants, feminists and liberals and, increasingly, in the board rooms of America's most powerful corporations. Moreover, while his diagnosis appeals, the solutions he offers are unworkable.

Bill Clinton, the sole candidate of his party, has the luxury of incumbency. He has the appearance of having a firm hold on foreign affairs, there are signs of economic recovery and evidence of Republicans interfering with his social programmes. The opposition is divided and in disarray over how to deal with the Buchanan phenomenon. Barring an unexpected turn of events his re-election appears likely. Yet he, too, has been touched by the reversals in American politics. In his State of the Union Message, a presidential opening of the electoral campaign, he sounded more Republican than Democrat, promising among other things the diminution of government's role in society.



Before all is lost

Old habits die hard, just ask Shimon Peres and the military leaders of Hamas. In response to a wave of carnage launched by supporters of the martyred bomb maker, Yehiya Ayyash, Peres has declared "a total war" against all terrorist groups, restricted the freedom of travel for more than two million Palestinians and begun a sizeable military crackdown on the residents of the West Bank. But nearly ten years of armed conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis have already proven that might does not make right.

The pursuing of peace, on the other hand, is a more viable option. Yet, the recent attacks, and Peres' response to them, have seemingly passed a death sentence on the peace process, leaving many wondering if the gun will be fired or discarded.

While the answer to this will only appear in the future, what is clear is that extremist elements on both sides of the line are rapidly seizing the day. Under consideration by Peres is the inclusion of some right-wingers into the cabinet. And, as Israelis draw closer to deal with the violence, a rift in the ranks of Hamas and the Palestinian population in the self-rule and Occupied Territories is becoming evident. Hamas' political leaders are calling for a termination of the violence, but the military wing is not listening. For Peres, Arafat and the peace process, the ramifications of this divide or be conquered scheme are obvious — should extremism have its hey-day, then all the accomplishments over the last two years will be eclipsed by darkness.

At this juncture, the worst course of action would be one exhorting a reversion to old tactics such as border closings and escalating military tactics. The war against disillusionment, outrage and ideology cannot be won with bullets. It must be fought through compromise, cooperation and perseverance on the part of Arafat, Peres and their supporters.

Consequently, the burden of proof now lies with both the PNA and Israel. If a comprehensive peace is the aim, then continued dialogue underscored by decisive bilateral action is the means. And if a heavy hand must be used, then let it fall on those responsible for the violence by those responsible for the peace.

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Shrouded in a safety net

Social funds, argues Galal Amin, operate as a get out clause, allowing international financial institutions and donor countries to shirk their duties to the poor

A recent paper, *Economic Reforms, Growth, Employment and the Social Sector in Arab Economies*, compiled by International Monetary Fund (IMF) experts, concluded that the growth of Arab economies over the past 15 years had been disappointing, though with regard to social indicators the picture was "relatively favourable in aggregate". It is easy to agree with the first part of the conclusion. The second, though, is rather more controversial.

Let us use Egypt as an example. In *Everyday in Egypt*, a 1991 World Bank report, it was estimated that 20-25 per cent of the population could be classified as "poor". They spend 75-80 per cent of their incomes on food, which makes them particularly vulnerable to increases in food prices. The World Bank report goes on to state that "recent evidence suggests that the majority of households have been reducing their food consumption in response to price increases".

The same report revealed that the real value of the salaries paid to government employees had, by 1987, fallen to practically half their 1973 levels. Government expenditure per student in real terms has been declining, by 1991, to a fifth of its levels ten years earlier. With regard to health, the report stated that "it is not uncommon for patients admitted to surgery to be asked to furnish bandages, syringes or even small surgical equipment. In some instances, those who can afford to bring these items may have priority over those who cannot."

It is not difficult to find evidence of a similar deterioration in social indicators from other Arab countries, including Sudan, Iraq, Algeria and Lebanon, which leads one to wonder how it is possible to conclude that the picture is "relatively favourable in aggregate". The only indicators, though, which the IMF paper uses to support its conclusions concern life expectancy and school enrolment ratios. Yet such statistics can appear favourable without actually reflecting any significant improvement in the general state of things. A slight reduction in infant mortality figures, for instance, can make a significant impact on overall life expectancy statistics. School enrolment ratios, too, have little bearing on the quality of the education that is being provided, which can, and does, decline as numbers of students rise.

To draw a disappointing picture of growth rates but a relatively favourable one of social indicators is intended to convey but one message — concentrate on growth and do not worry too much about social indicators. Similarly, the observation that the trouble with education and health provision in Arab countries is less a question of too little being spent, but of inefficient spending, also contains a subtle, spend less on education and health, it is suggested, but make it more cost effective. And how can it be made more cost effective?

By being privatised, of course.

Now no one can deny that expenditure on education and health in Arab countries is far from being cost effective. Hardly anything in Arab countries is cost effective anyway, which includes sectors over which the IMF and World Bank prefer to draw a blanket of silence. But what is wrong in trying to make expenditure on education and health more cost effective while increasing that expenditure in real terms? And why is it that the IMF economists choose to ignore the most likely outcome of their exhortations — that public expenditure on health and education will be reduced, though without any improvement in cost effectiveness?

The IMF paper insists that "by obtaining substantial private sector involvement, the impact of public spending is amplified." But there is plenty of evidence that in Egypt public health and education services have deteriorated as private provision has grown.

By now it has become customary for IMF and World Bank reports discussing the impact of stabilisation and adjustment policies on the poor to add, as a footnote, that it would be desirable to introduce some mechanisms that might protect the poor from the worst consequences of such policies. These consequences are supposed to exist only in the short term, since in the long term everything will be made well as a result of higher growth. And

though we are never told how short the short term is, we are sometimes warned that the short term can be prolonged if governments are "hesitant" in applying the proposed medicine.

The preferred mechanism for providing short term relief for the distress of the poor is the establishment of a social fund which is supposed to solicit donations from aid giving countries and international institutions, and extend loans to particularly needy sections of the population who have suffered in one way or another from the reform programme.

In the Arab world there are two such funds: the National Aid Fund of Jordan, established in 1987, and the Social Fund of Egypt, established in 1991. They have shown themselves, so far, to be less than efficient in providing even a basic safety net. In 1994, Jordan's National Aid Fund made loans that reached only 3.5 per cent of the population while in Egypt, according to the Social Fund's own reports, it has managed, over the four years of its existence, to create permanent jobs for less than half the annual increase in the numbers of people entering the job market.

The fact is, I'm afraid, that the activities of such funds, in contrast to investment activities performed by the state or by the private sector, constitutes little beyond the occasional act of charity. And while there is no reason to object to acts of charity in

principle, one is more than entitled to be sceptical if such charity is performed simply in order to divert attention from other duties that should, but which are not, being performed.

Unfortunately there are a great many reasons why one should be quizzical over the activities of such social funds. Take the Egyptian model as an example. During the last three years, the Egyptian Social Fund has been spending about \$100 million a year "on the poor", though over the same period annual investments in Egypt amounted to some \$8 billion. The expenditure of the fund, then, comprises just 1.25 per cent of total investments. Now, given such figures, if barely one per cent of total investments were directed towards projects that would have an impact on alleviating the plight of the poor, then Egypt might dispense with the fund altogether, and spare itself the trouble of having to go cap in hand to donor countries. Nor would channeling such a small proportion of investments away from projects that can be of no benefit to the poor have any impact on the overall picture of investments. Yet it is not being done.

And this is what I mean by diverting attention from duties that are not being performed. Policy makers and aid donors, in league with international financial institutions, are willing, it seems, to spare no effort when it comes to establishing safety nets. They do so, though, so as to avoid taking a simpler, though politically more difficult, action, and that is to re-allocate investment in such a way as to reach those who are really in need.

The pivotal states compromise

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the idea of 'pivotal states' advanced by professor of history at Yale University, Paul Kennedy

In the last few years, various theories have been put forward to explain the nature of the post-bipolar world, the most famous being Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" and Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilisations" theories. The latest such offering comes from another American strategic thinker, Yale Professor Paul Kennedy, who believes that while priority should be given by the United States to the management of its relations with other world powers, like Europe, Japan, Russia and China, American policymakers should also focus their efforts on a number of countries in the south which he calls "pivotal states". (see the January/February 1996 issue of *Foreign Affairs*).

The basic idea behind the pivotal states theory is that rather than spread its resources over the globe, the US should channel its overseas aid more discriminatively towards a small number of states, not necessarily friendly to the US, which display specific characteristics. A pivotal state is defined as one whose regional importance is such that its economic progress and stability would bolster its region's economic vitality and create favourable conditions for American investments and, conversely, whose collapse would lead to "transboundary mayhem" to the detriment of US interests and security. A state classified as pivotal should continue to be favoured over others, regardless of its human rights record. The criteria by which a state qualifies as pivotal as spelled out by Kennedy are: a large population and an important geo-strategic location; an undeniable economic potential and the ability to become an "emerging market". It must also have the capacity to affect regional and international stability, more specifically, the stability of American interests.

Kennedy selects a number of countries in the South which meet the criteria of a pivotal state: Mexico and Brazil in Latin America; Algeria,

Egypt and South Africa in Africa; Turkey in Europe; India, Pakistan and Indonesia in Asia. Conspicuously absent from the list is Israel, either because it does not qualify as part of the South in Washington's eyes or because there is no danger that it will ever become other than friendly to the US, even if it is occasionally caught red-handed in acts of political, economic or technological espionage in the US, the latest incident being just a few days ago.

While on the face of it the theory appears favourable to Egypt, in that it guarantees continued American support even if Cairo should differ with Washington, we should not let this apparent advantage blind us to its negative aspects. To begin with, it makes Washington's interests the exclusive and absolute frame of reference, all the other countries of the world serving only as instruments to be used for the furtherance of those interests. The theory attaches little importance to whether a country is friendly to the US or not, provided of course that its demise does not extend certain limits. For example, the theory cannot be applied to Iran, Iraq or Libya, but it can to Syria, especially after it concludes peace agreements with Israel.

Actually, the theory touches on the important issue of state sovereignty. Once an absolute notion, sovereignty has acquired a more relative character in the age of the global village. A number of factors have contributed to this transformation: the information and communication revolution, environmental pollution which is no respecter of borders, and the disappearance of the acute polarisation which characterised the bipolar

world order. For a while, contemporary forms of overstepping national sovereignty seemed to be a positive development, in the sense that this could promote greater interpenetration and interdependence between states and offer all societies better chances for prosperity. But the notion of pivotal states, which lays the theoretical framework for a global system in which the United States will "use" other states to further its own interests, postulates just the opposite in that the states used will necessarily be placed in a subordinate position, which can only promote greater dependency. In that sense, Kennedy's theory can be seen as an updated version of the dependency which prevailed under imperialism.

More, it is an attempt to replace a bipolar, or even multi-polar, world order by a unipolar system, calling unashamedly for a strategy in which the South is enlisted in the service of one state in particular, the United States, not for the North as a whole nor for the new world order in general. Kennedy's call for a pragmatic refocusing of American aid, which would entail increasing aid to the pivotal states while reducing it to non-pivotal states in the South, responds to the growing isolationist mood in the US, where the bulk of American public opinion sees foreign aid as a major drain on the treasury and a heavy burden on the taxpayer that is no longer justified in the absence of a clear-cut external enemy. In fact, this logic played a major role in Clinton's election victory in 1992, although since then his administration has found itself forced to embark on several overseas engagements, including its abysmal

by unsuccessful intervention in Somalia.

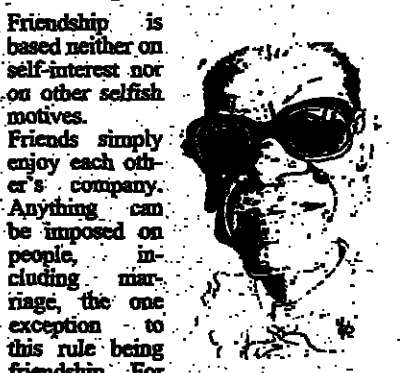
The criteria by which the new theory classifies states are not those which prevailed throughout the Cold War, when the main criterion was the loyalty of a state to one or the other of the two world blocks, despite attempts to devise a third position, namely, non-alignment. Kennedy's theory classifies states according to the degree of danger they can represent for US strategic interests if they collapse or descend into chaos. Drawing on the idea of preventive diplomacy advocated by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali, it recommends that the US focus its efforts on "rescuing" a number of states, regardless of how closely they align themselves with the United States or of how capable they are of standing on their own feet without external help.

Is a way, the theory is based on a new form of bipolarity, international stability as represented by the United States versus terrorism, which is on the rise in every area in which the new world order has failed to devise satisfactory settlements for existing disputes, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, Northern Ireland or even Bosnia. The states subject to collapse are those which can fall prey to terrorism, confirming the dictum that "terrorism is the contemporary form of war".

While the pivotal states theory has not been officially adopted by Washington, it has been put forward by influential circles in the US as a more efficient foreign policy based on selective engagement, a compromise solution, as it were, between America's total withdrawal from involvement in the outside world and its drive to consolidate its global domination, as well as a way of avoiding crises like the ones to which it was exposed by reason of its compulsory withdrawal from Vietnam and, more recently, from Somalia, possibly soon from Bosnia.

The consolation of friends

By Naguib Mahfouz



Friendship is based neither on self-interest nor on other selfish motives. Friends simply enjoy each other's company. Anything can be imposed on people, including marriage, the one exception to this rule being friendship. For friendship can only develop when there is a sense of spiritual closeness. Such closeness is the solid base upon which friendship is built; its existence guarantees that no obstacle will prove insuperable. Friendships develop between men and women. They develop across generations, between people of different cultures and traditions.

Take the circle of *Al-Ahram* as an example. We all differed in our views and outlooks on life but we were all united by a love of art. That was our common ground, which replaced the shared interest in politics that had originally tied the group together.

Recently, an old friend who had lived in the United States for many years, attended one of our meetings. He said that while he was away the thing that he had missed most was the company of close friends, and their pleasant evening conversation. He regretted that abroad there is no time for friendship. When you call people they ask you immediately what you want. People are suspicious, it seems, of contact for the sake of contact. Friendship is one of the great pleasures of life. And as you age, it becomes, if anything, even more important.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salaway.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

Days of terror

THE NATIONAL and party press, this week, highlighted the Hamas bombings in Israel, the killing of Saddam Hussein's dissident in-laws, and the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Sudan. On the domestic scene, the papers dealt with the recent revival of militant Islamist violence in Assiut and the meeting, held in the context of the Cairo International Book Fair, between President Hosni Mubarak and top Egyptian writers and journalists.

Dealing with the forthcoming Sudanese elections, Ibrahim Nafie, chief editor of *Al-Ahram*, wrote on Saturday a front-page editorial comment, entitled "Till when will the farce continue in Sudan?" He wrote: "It is a stage play with which the Khartoum regime can hope to fool no one. No one is likely to believe that the Khartoum regime is turning its back on dictatorship, totalitarianism and theocracy, nor that it is moving towards democracy, nor yet again that it can win any kind of legitimacy, constitutional or otherwise."

Nafie continues: "The great majority of the Sudanese people will continue to view this regime as a usurper of power. It has driven millions of Sudanese to escape their own homeland, and placed Sudan under the dark cloud of a military junta, which in the name of Islam, is assassinating Sudanese civil society on a daily basis, providing a safe haven

for terrorists from across the region, and opening the country's borders to those who have declared a war of terror against their governments and peoples, offering them Sudanese passports and providing support for their terrorist acts against their countries, of which Egypt stands in the forefront."

It is futile, therefore, argues Nafie sarcastically to wonder at Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir's decision to appoint the body which is to supervise the elections, in which he will be running as a candidate. To question democratic credentials of such an act, says Nafie, is to imply that there is something serious about the forthcoming elections in Sudan. As it is nothing but "a badly directed

excuse". "Such dictatorial regimes," he wrote, "are always able to contain ruptures within them so long as a viable political opponent or alternative, capable of overthrowing it, has made its appearance."

"It is certain that the fleeing of Hussein Kamel and his brother into Jordan six months ago was followed by a wide scale purge within the ruling clique in Baghdad. Fissures within the ruling circle surrounding Saddam necessarily resulted in more repression and suffering for the Iraqi people. As for the world outside, trust in the Baghdad ruler now stands at zero."

Amiaa El-Naqash dealt with the same topic in her column in the weekly *Al-Ahram*, voice of the leftist Tagammu Party.

Under the title: "Vengeance and the interests of Iraq", she wrote: "The certain result of this massacre is that no one in the world will swallow the claim that it was a tribal killing."

Even if it had been, it was the responsibility of the Iraqi government to provide protection for the persons for whom it had pledged sanctuary. Had it been determined to take them to account for revealing secret information, it should not have given them amnesty. It could have put them on trial, ending with the same result, but without the enormous harm that has been done to the regime's, and even more important, the Iraqi people's standing."

Ragab El-Banna, chief editor of the national weekly magazine, *October*, reminded that Saddam was the West's own creature. Under the title: "Who created the tyrant?" El-Banna wrote: "What kind of man is this who decides to make orphans out of his grandchildren, denying them their fathers' care, make widows out of his two daughters, and filling his household with the blood of his own family members?"

"But before judging Saddam, or denouncing him, should we not ask who is this man? Who created him? Who provided him with all these weapons, and with this level of murderous arrogance of power?"

"Saddam Hussein did not try to hide his aims when he was smashing weapons and chemical and nuclear military hardware. Decision makers in the West were not blind to what was going on in Iraq, but gave the impression that they preferred to remain silent for purely commercial utilitarian reasons — so that the American, French, German, Italian, British and Austrian arms industries will continue to find a huge market which absorbs everything offered it, and pays in cash."

"It was not a coincidence, therefore, nor a surprise, that Saddam Hussein came to possess a massive military force, out of which Western corporations had realised fantastic profits. Neither was it coincidental nor surprising that the US and the Western states later undertook to destroy this

military force, again making fantastic profits."

"Saddam's existence has been very beneficial for the West. For a price, they sell him unlimited weapons. They destroy these same weapons, and the Arabs foot the bill."

The second suicide bombing in Jerusalem was the subject of a front page editorial comment in *Al-Ahram* Al-Yaum, the weekly edition of the national newspaper *Al-Ahram*. Under the title "Arab's dilemma", Editor-in-Chief Ibrahim Nafie wrote: "Those who explode car-bombs to kill the greatest possible number of Israelis are an exact copy of Israeli extremists, such as the criminal who opened his machine gun fire on praying Palestinians at

which plan and finance the terrorist operations committed by Palestinians against Israelis, and those by Israelis against Palestinians. Both have the common aim of exploding the peace process forever."

"The Israeli chief of staff has asked the Palestinian president to immediately order the arrest of hundreds of Palestinians, active members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and detain them indefinitely."

"He has also called upon Arafat to cooperate with Israeli security bodies to put an end to the activities of the Ezzeddin Al-Qassam group, the armed wing of Hamas."

"The ball is now in the Palestinian court, and all eyes are pointed towards Arafat to see where he will kick it. Undoubtedly, the Palestinian president is now in an unenviable situation. What he is being asked to do is difficult to realise or to face."

Mustafa Amin, in his back-page column in the national daily *Al-Ahram*, commented on the process of privatisation of the Egyptian public sector. "People were shocked when they realised, through statements by the president and the prime minister, that the value of the assets of the public sector is LE88 billion and its debts LE71 billion. This means that if things go on as they are public sector debts will inevitably reach the LE88 billion mark, making the whole public sector worth zero. No self-respecting state can accept such folly."

Ibrahim Saada

Close
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Condition
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Egyptian Tourism is soaring

By
**Dr Mamdouh
El-Beltagui**
Minister of
Tourism



There is no doubt that tourism is on the upward turn in Egypt. It is the main source of foreign currency, ranking second in importance after Egyptian expatriate remittances, and is taking its place ahead of oil exports and revenues from the Suez Canal.

Egypt has a remarkable tourist product: its historical heritage is unparalleled; it has a favourable geographic location; and a mild climate, all year-round. The natural environment is enriched by the River Nile, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea beaches, not to mention the vast expanses of desert with unique oasis communities. Egypt's friendly and hospitable people have become proverbial, and even our diversity in handicrafts has become an attraction.

Our media campaign — successfully launched last year — was oriented toward the trade press as well as consumers, with heavy emphasis on major TV stations, newspapers and magazines. Germany, which ranks number one in the number of tourists who travel to Egypt, was naturally a prime target. The total expenditures in 1995 on publicity targeting Germany will be US\$4.5 million. In 1995, over 319,000 German tourists came to Egypt, and the aim for 1996 is set way beyond that. Already, in January 1996, 28,070 German tourists have come to Egypt, and the upward trend is expected to continue.

To meet the increasing demand for international conferences in Egypt, regular air and land transportation facilities have been improved, convention equipment and facilities streamlined, and deluxe accommodation increased.

The importance of Cairo as the scene for international conventions has done much to advertise Egypt. Such meetings, like the Eleventh General Assembly of World Tourism Organizations last October, Africa Telecom, the UN International Conference on Population and Development, and the European Union/Middle-East Partnership held in 1994 have been of invaluable promotional importance.

Naturally, the result of all these efforts reflects positively on the volume of tourist arrivals, tourist nights and tourist revenue.

Revitalisation of the tourist industry in Egypt can be traced to the second half of 1994 when there was an upward trend. The figures of 1995 confirm that 3,133,461 tourists (an increase of 21.36 per cent over 1994) visited Egypt and spent 20,451,364 nights (an increase of 32.52 per cent).

Tourist revenue for the fiscal year 1994/1995 reached about 2.3 billion dollars, adding 519.6 million dollars (an increase of 29.2 per cent) over the previous fiscal year.

As a result of the improved climate for tourism, and in order to meet the growing demand on Egypt as a prime destination, investments have been encouraged. Accommodation facilities are on the increase. The present 64,958 rooms (in 1995) will be increased to some 105,000 by the year 2002. It is worth mentioning that Egyptian private sector participation in the various tourist regions has reached 100 per cent.

For further encouragement of tourist investments, the new cabinet has adopted important resolutions to accelerate development. These include:

— Encouraging the operation of charter flights to Egypt, by allowing those flights to land at any airport in Egypt including Cairo if they originate from cities not served by EgyptAir. If served, Cairo can be taken as a departure point as long as it is not their first stop.

— Work on Ras Al-Naqab airport in South Sinai will be given priority for completion, and new airports will be built at Marsa Allam on the Red Sea and on the Gulf of Aqaba.

— More incentives and facilities will be provided to attract both local and foreign capital investments.

— Infrastructure projects such as water supplies, electric power stations and airports are being developed.

— An integrated network for "air ambulance" and health care services for tourists and citizens in various tourist areas is to be established.

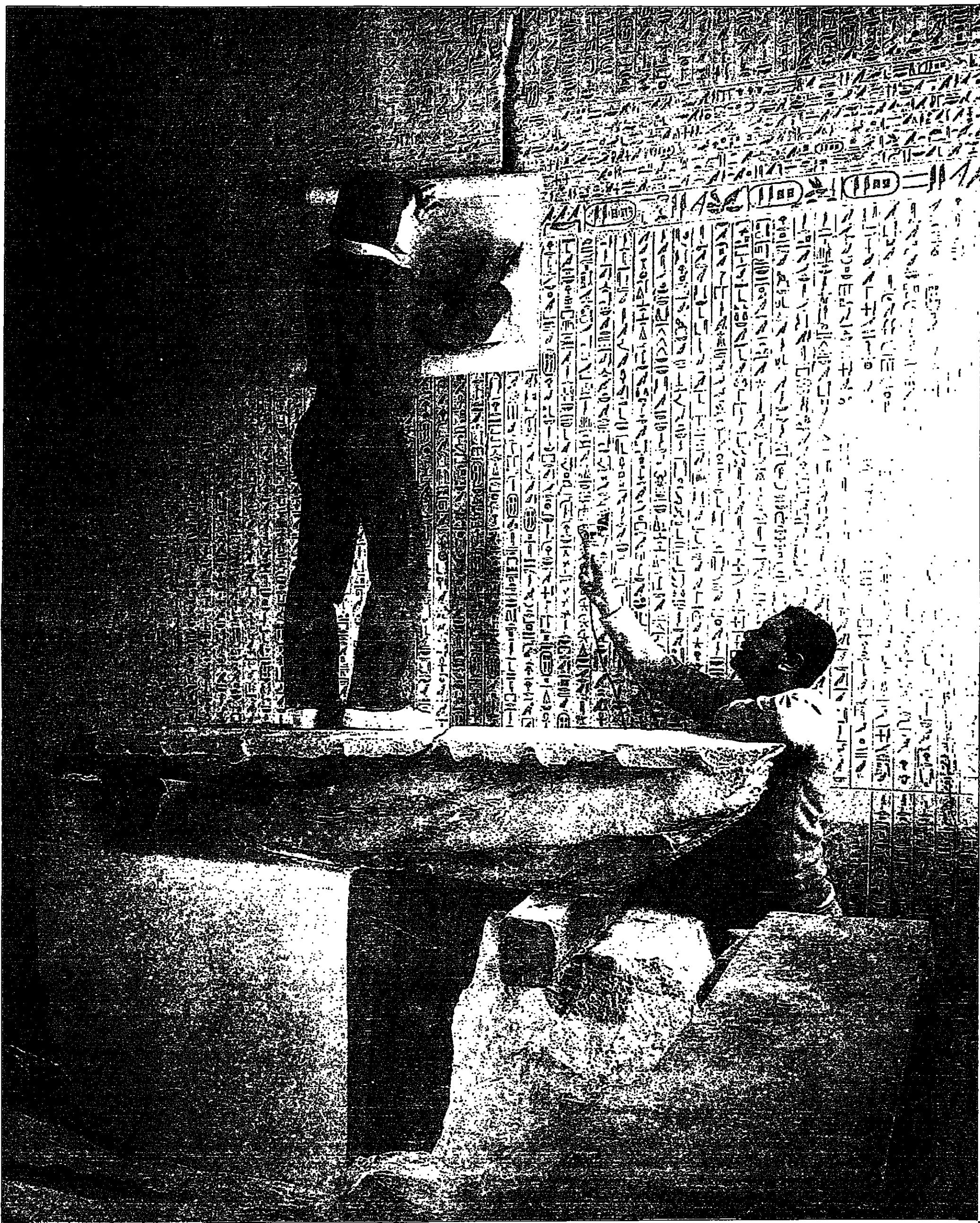
— Marinas and yachting facilities will help diversify attractions for tourists.

— Tourist cruise liner fees will be reduced by 75 per cent (previously 50 per cent), and there will be a 50 per cent reduction in service charges (previously 30 per cent).

— The quality of tourist services will be improved through better education and training of personnel, and sophisticated methods to upgrade the level of those services will be established.

There is little doubt that these new resolutions, in addition to the above-mentioned strategies, will bring even further rewards to an already flourishing industry.

Deciphering Egypt



The discoveries are not over: Throughout the country excavations and research are being undertaken by both Egyptian archaeologists and foreign missions from Germany, France, and Britain. In the picture above a French archaeologist is working on hieroglyphic texts in the interior of the Pyramid of Pepy I at Saqqara
photo: Antonio Attini (Courtesy: Gaddis)

An ideal package

German doctors tell **Abdu Moubasher**, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Frankfurt, what attracts them to Egypt

After the first-time performance of a critical surgical procedure, witnessed by doctors and journalists from around the world, one journalist had an edge on the crowd. As people learned that he was from Egypt, the tables turned and he found himself the target of their inquiry.

Naturally, to these aspiring German travellers to Egypt, the country's medical history was of particular interest. The surgeons were fascinated by the medical knowledge of the ancient Egyptians that dates as far back as 5,000 years ago. At that time, there were dentists, individuals who specialised in different parts of the human body, and a corpus of literature on

treatment.

It was interesting to hear their interchange: those who had already visited Egypt and those who harboured a strong desire to do so. And the reasons for their interest in Egypt were manifold.

Perhaps the first and strongest attraction was the Pharaonic civilization and the tombs and temples that dot the country from the Mediterranean to the Pyramids of Giza, and as far south as Aswan and Abu Simbel.

An equally strong attraction seems to be Egypt's year-round sunshine. Not only are there marvellous beaches along the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and in

Sinai, but there are excellent opportunities for water-sports. For a north European country like Germany with limited sunshine, Egypt's UV rays are tempting.

Egypt's media campaign in Germany over the past year was of high quality. The diversity of Egypt's attractions, its large and luxurious hotels and its up-to-date sporting facilities were attention-getters for Germans from all walks of life.

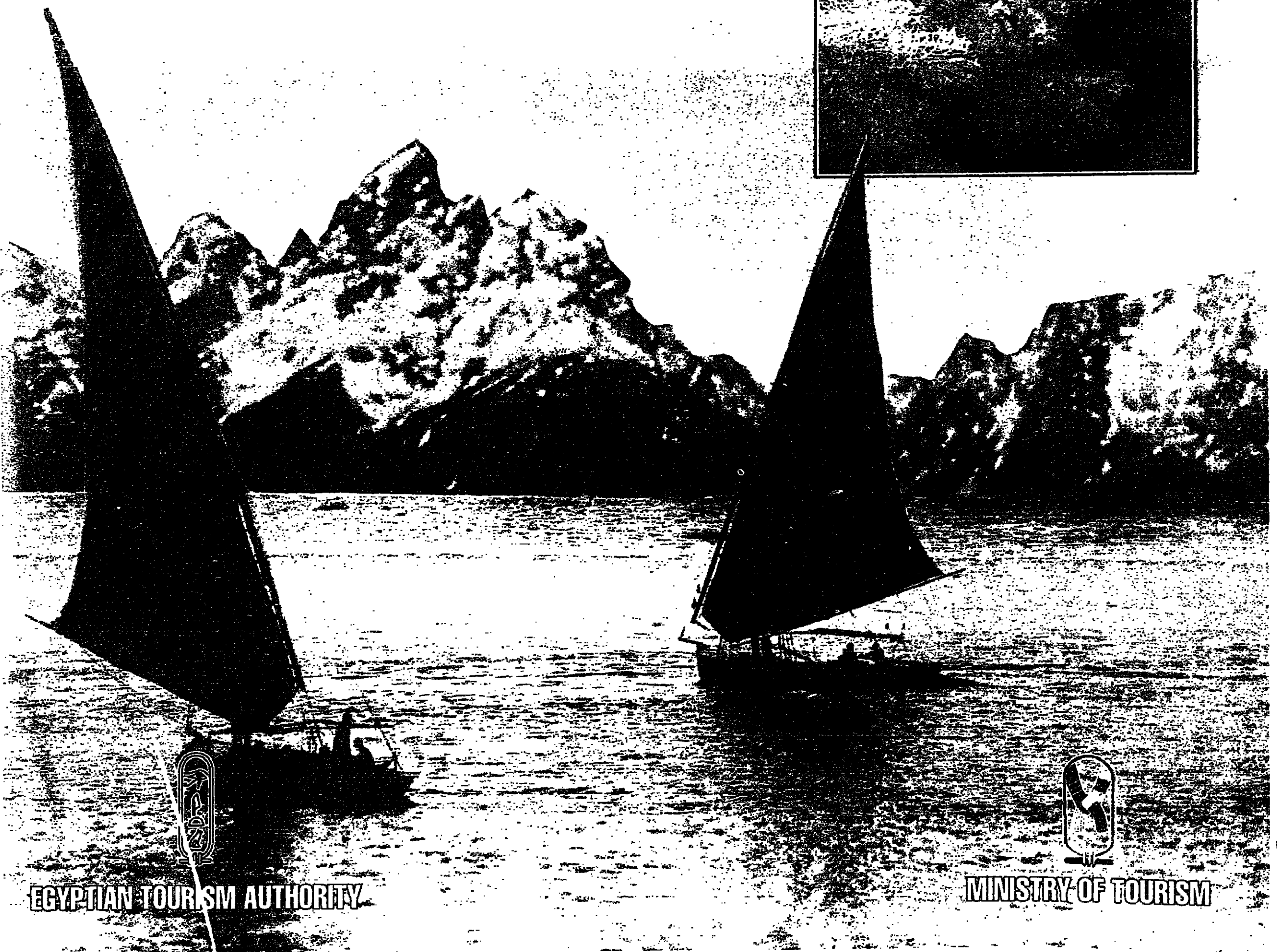
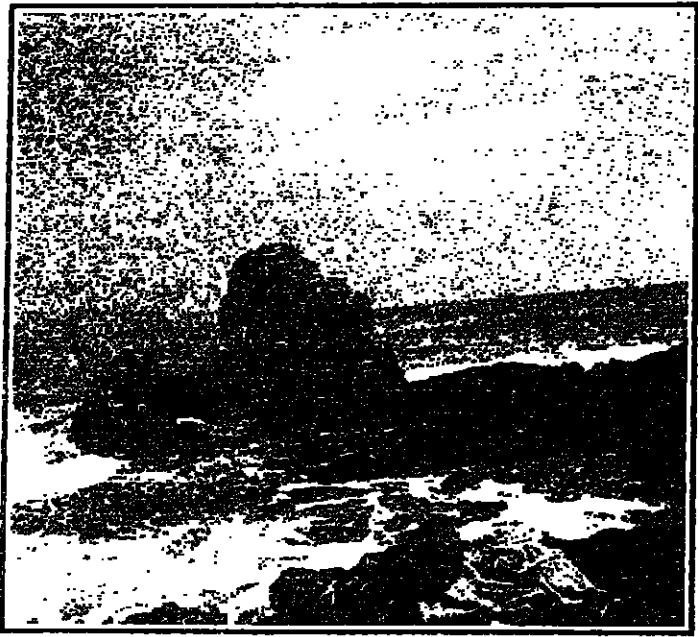
The media campaign succeeded in putting Egypt on the international tourist map and major travel agencies in Germany are now presenting various itineraries to travellers. The response is overwhelmingly positive.

For example, the number of charter flights from Germany to Egypt has soared to 65 per week, and the flights are packed to full capacity.

Fat'hi Nagui, head of EgyptAir in Germany, said that of Germany's population of 80 million, 30 million travel abroad every year, and spend DM30-40 billion.

Because of the large and constant flow of German tourists to Egypt, especially to its seaside resorts, it has become increasingly difficult to find accommodation during the peak seasons. To meet the demand, more tourist villages along the Red Sea and in Sinai are springing up.

EGYPT HAS IT ALL



EGYPTIAN TOURISM AUTHORITY

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

سكز من الإصل

Breath-taking holiday

EGYPTAIR offers a 25 per cent discount on its international and domestic flights, and hotels offer a 25 to 40 per cent discount — but only to participants in local competitions.

Fishing, horse riding, shooting, rowing and windsurfing competitions take place in Egypt all year-round, and tourists can certainly benefit by adding them to their vacation plans. The contests usually last for four days and are held under the auspices of the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) and the Egyptian Angling Federation.

Fishing enthusiasts can participate in five international and local contests in Hurgada, an international angling competition is held in February and a national contest in July. Two other contests are held in Sharm Al-Sheikh in May and November. In October, Port Said becomes the stage of a fifth national fishing competition.

Contests that take place in the Red Sea Governorate have now turned into full scale festivals including folkloric dancing and cycling races.

The International Nile Rowing Festival in Luxor is a major event that takes place in December. It has already attracted participants from the US, Germany, Italy, Austria, England, France and Egypt. When the participants gather — dressed in Pharaonic costumes and carrying their oars — they march from the Winter Palace Hotel to the Luxor Temple, followed by troupes of folkloric dancers and musicians. Inside the temple, the participants light the festival torch and the whole evening is devoted to entertainment.

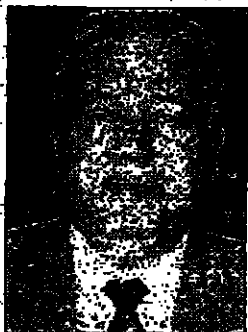
Professional car races from over 20 countries gather every October to take part in the International Pharaohs' Rally. Participants race through the eastern and western deserts, the Nile Valley, the oases and Sinai. This year, drivers will be routed through the Qattara Depression.

A total of 1,020 runners, representing 17 nationalities, came together for the third successive year at this month's International Egyptian Marathon in Luxor.

The runners start the race at Hatshepsut's Temple and circle around famous landmarks of the western bank before returning to Deir El-Bahri. The winners receive prizes and free tickets on Egyptair.

Two Arab horse shows are organised annually to attract horse lovers to Egypt. The first is the Sharqiya Arab Horse Festival, held in Ma. The second takes place in November at Al-Zahra farm in Ain Sems, a Cairo suburb. As one of Egypt's most famous governorates for breeding and training horses, the Sharqiya Governorate has developed a tradition of holding horse festivals annually, which includes nine different contests that range from long-distance racing to polo.

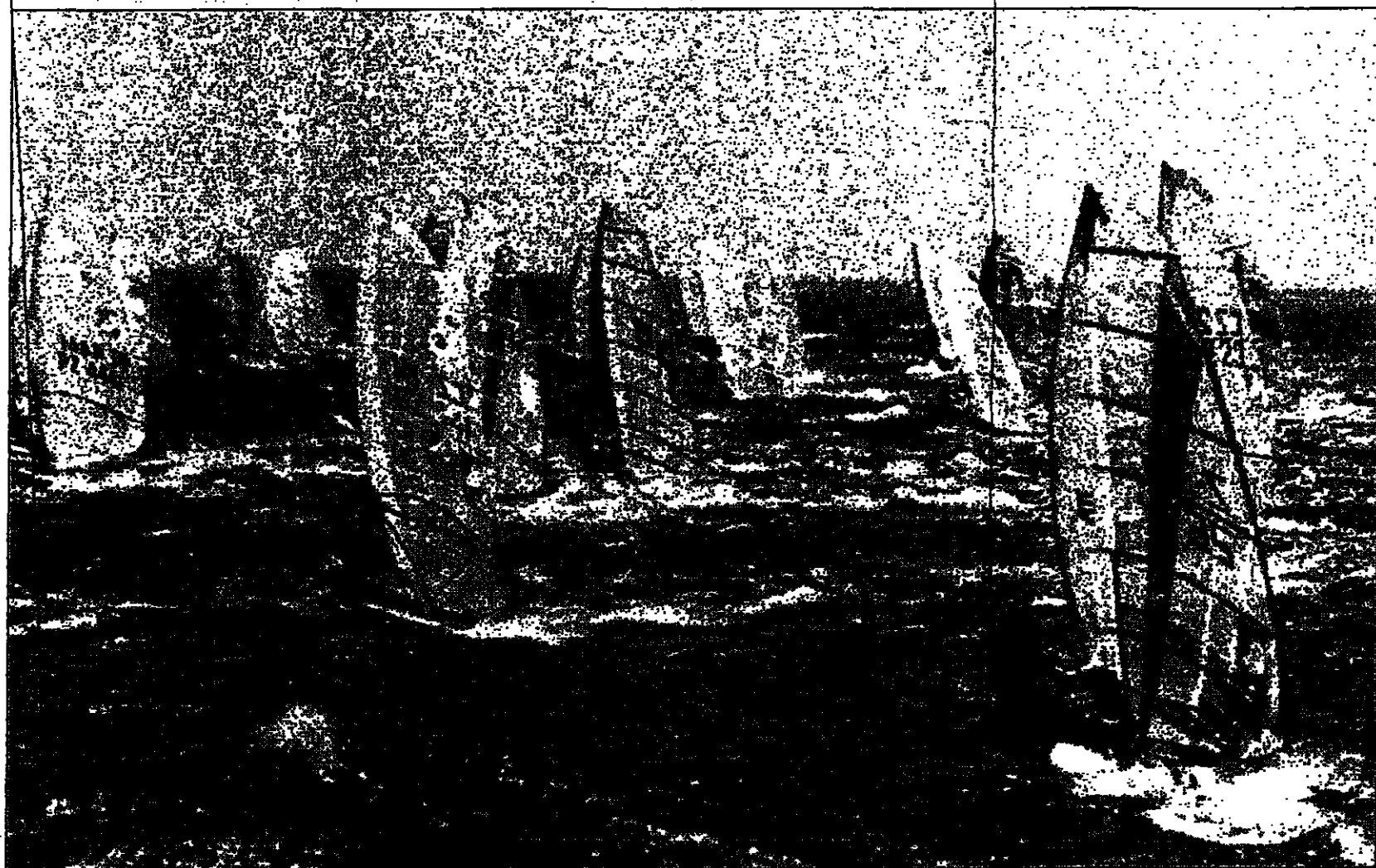
The vent is particularly popular in the United Arab Emirates and has even gained popularity in Europe, especially since one of France's best judges participated in the last festival. While valuable prizes are awarded to first-place winners, others receive medals and certificates of merit.



Adel Abdel-Aziz
Head of the ETA



A bird's eye view of a cycling race in the desert



A scene from a windsurfing competition held in Hurgada

Cities for all seasons

SUEZ Canal cities such as Ismailia, Port Said and Suez are attractive and popular tourist destinations. A plan is being prepared to develop these areas in order to meet growing demand.

The area between Ismailia and Qantara Sharq is being developed in two phases: the first involves cooperation between the Armed Forces, the Governorate of Ismailia and the Ministry of Construction. The second will be carried out by the Ismailia Governorate, with the cooperation of Kuwaiti partners.

An Egyptian-Kuwaiti company was formed to carry out the "Fish Lake" project in Qantara Sharq on 1,200 feddans. It will include a city with full services and utilities, villas, deluxe housing, water sports facilities, golf courts, mosques, trade centres, tourist villages and hotels.

In an interview with the *Weekly*, Ismailia governor, Maj. Gen. Mohamed Abdel-Salam El-Mahgoub declared that Ismailia is awaiting investors: "There are huge investment opportunities and facilities in the area, and we are offering incentives, including favourable land deals," he said.

He emphasised the need to build more hotels, especially four-star accommodations, and to expand the entertainment sector. Negotiations are currently under way for the establishment of an aqua-park using Spanish expertise," he said.

Ismailia, which is situated half-way between Port Said and Suez, and only 120kms from Cairo, is currently known as a weekend destination. "During public and religious holidays we attract about two million local and foreign visitors. But we are working to make Ismailia a city for all seasons. We have moderate year-round temperatures as well as extensive opportunities for enthusiasts of water sports, as well as antiquities," said Mahgoub.

Most significantly, plans are afoot to promote the region through a series of festivals, conferences and other activities "which pull the crowds and raise Ismailia's profile," said Mahgoub. Moreover, a new cultural palace, due to be completed this year, will be provided with interpreting facilities, special halls for cultural and artistic events, and a theatre which can seat 1,300 people. Among other things, the theatre could serve as an open house for north and south Sinai, as well as the canal cities.

One of the most elegant areas near Ismailia is Fayad. It is a tranquil spot with a sandy coastline where elegant villas have been built. The Suez Canal Authority operates a ferry service across the canal for visitors.

Port Said is another of the canal cities which has great tourist potential. It is just three hours north of Cairo by car and was founded in 1860 as a harbour at the northern end of the Suez Canal. It soon became a thriving com-

mercial zone and, when the city was granted tax-free status, it saw an increase in trade. Its attractions include the Military Museum which features the events of the Anglo-French invasion of 1956 and the October War of 1973. In the Port Said national museum are Pharaonic antiquities and a room with memorabilia from the opening ceremony of the Suez Canal.

For many visitors, the main attraction is the sea shore east of the canal, with its shell-filled beaches.

Another attraction in Port Said is the lively fish market, where the day's catch, including giant shrimp, is displayed on blocks of ice.

A side trip for visitors can involve a trip across the canal to Port Fouad on the Suez Canal Authority's ferry, which shuttles back and forth every few minutes. Port Fouad has some colonial-style houses — a reminder that the area was once the residence of high-ranking British officials.

Nature lovers in search of splendid scenery will find what they want in the Suez Governorate. The area is 134kms east of Cairo and offers a variety of attractions including water sports, sightseeing and excursions to famous Sinai battlefields. Over the last few years, a large number of youth hostels, chalets, hotels, restaurants and clubs have been built, mostly in the framework of tourist villages.

Airport update

EGYPT'S airports, especially those serving established tourist destinations, have been improved. According to the Ministry of Transportation and Civil Aviation, the condition of these airports and needed expansions, are as follows:

Luxor Airport operates around-the-clock. It accommodates all types of airplanes and contracts are carried out for all automated landing equipment. All terminal expansions have been completed, the renewal of the old building is underway, and studies for the establishment of a new departure hall are being conducted.

Aswan airport also operates day and night. It accommodates all kinds of planes and enjoys an automated landing system. A new terminal is also under construction.

Abu Simbel airport operates only during the day and only accommodates medium-sized planes. Expansion of the terminals has already started as has the construction of a new runway.

Hurgada airport, which operates day and night and receives all types of airplanes, has an automated landing system. The terminal has already been completed as has the runway pavement.

At the Sharm Al-Sheikh airport, renovations in the terminal have been completed and expansions have already begun.

Nozha airport in Alexandria operates around-the-clock and accommodates medium-sized planes. They have just started installing an automated landing equipment system and the pavement of the main tarmac and runway has been completed.

The newly operational Ras Al-Naqab airport operates only by day and accommodates all kinds of planes. The main entrance has been paved and the lighting of the tarmac is under construction. A proposal for a new terminal has been submitted.

Port Said airport operates day and night and accommodates medium-sized planes. Departure and arrival halls, as well as the pavement and lighting of the main tarmac, have been completed.

The Ministry of Tourism assures that the aforementioned preparations, undertaken by the Ministry of Transportation and Civil Aviation, and the new cabinet resolutions that facilitate charter flight operations in Egypt, will boost tourism — considered one of the most vital ingredients of the national economy.

Indicators of growth

TOURISM is on the rise in Egypt, a fact clearly reflected in the latest set of statistics issued by the Ministry of Tourism.

Figures reveal that in January 1996, the number of tourists who came to Egypt was 246,066, well over the 196,357 tourists who came in January 1995 — an increase of 25.3 per cent.

Accordingly, tourist nights increased by 34.8 per cent in January 1996, visitors spent 1,859,128 nights compared to 1,379,602 in January 1995.

Figures show that tourists from the traditional top markets (and still targeted by the Ministry of Tourism) are also on the rise. French tourists increased by 118.5 per cent in January 1996, and their tourist nights increased by 105.4 per cent. The number of Italians increased by 91 per cent and their tourist nights increased by 101.8 per cent; Germans increased by 56.5 per cent with an 87.6 per cent increase for tourist nights; British by 34.5 per cent and 29.8 per cent for tourist nights; Japanese by 29.5 per cent and 25 per cent for tourist nights; and North Americans by 18 per cent and 41.4 per cent for tourist nights.

New markets like Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Scandinavia and South Korea are also figuring in the tourist upswing. Tourists from Poland increased by 99 per cent, while their tourist nights increased 144.6 per cent; Russians by 98.6 per cent, with tourist nights increasing 75 per cent; Swiss tourists by 79.5 per cent, with tourist nights 116.6 per cent; Scandinavians by 51.8 per cent with tourist nights 62.9 per cent; and South Koreans by 19.7 per cent, with tourist nights 25.5 per cent.

As a result of this increase from both traditional and new markets, the hotel accommodation rates increased by 57 per cent over January 1995. The occupancy rates in tourist areas are as follows:

— In Cairo, occupancy rates increased 68 per cent in January 1996 compared to 66 per cent in January last year.

— In Giza, occupancy rates increased 64 per cent compared to 60 per cent in January 1995.

— In Alexandria, occupancy rates increased 45 per cent compared to 44 per cent in January 1995.

— In Aswan, occupancy rates increased 35 per cent compared to 30 per cent in January 1995.

— In Luxor, occupancy rates increased 58 per cent compared to 41 per cent in January 1995.

— In the Red Sea Governorate, occupancy rates increased 74 per cent compared to 62 per cent in January 1995.

— In South Sinai occupancy rates increased 57 per cent compared to 66 per cent in January 1995.

These figures have already soared beyond the figures of the 1992 peak season, which stood at 3 million tourists. Clearly, Egypt stands poised to reach another peak in 1996, but the success of this depends on both the public and private tourist sectors. They must intensify their marketing efforts and maintain high standards. These are the real criteria for achieving a competitive edge over other tourist destinations.

Quality tourism for 1996

TOURISM is considered one of the most important generators of income and employment opportunities in Egypt. Deemed by both government and business as an engine for development, promotion of this industry, has multiple positive effects on the production and service sectors, undoubtedly leading to economic flourishing.

Ministry of Tourism plans for 1996:

With the maximisation of world tourist movements, competition is increasing between different tourist destinations as they vie to increase their market share of tourists. This is successfully achieved by offering high quality tourist services and reasonable prices, and by encouraging tourists to return to the same vacation spot.

Since contemporary tourists differ from those of yesterday, and are offered a vast array of destinations from which to choose, the Egyptian tourist industry must meet a growing challenge.

The Ministry of Tourism's priorities:

After the crisis faced by the Egyptian tourism industry, the ministry has started to rearrange its priorities, to survive the crisis and achieve its goals. The ministry has succeeded in promoting the tourist industry in a plan approved by the government in 1994.

A successful marketing and advertising campaign was executed in Europe, the US and Japan. The campaigns led to greater tourist movement beginning last July. A 14.7 per cent increase in the number of tourists to Egypt was recorded, compared to figures from the same period in 1993.

This year, promotional plans will be executed in new markets such as South Korea, Latin America and the former Soviet Union, thus diversifying the tourist population in Egypt, and in order to reach a target 6.3 million tourists for the year 2000.

Achievements in tourism developments:

In view of successful promotional efforts to increase tourism to Egypt, it was necessary to achieve a parallel increase in accommodation capacity.

During 1994 and 1995, 110 tourist locations were designated for the Gulf of Aqaba area, 24 locations in Ras Sadr, 18 in Ain Al-Sokhna, nine in the Red Sea region and two in Marsa Matruh. The aim was for an additional accommodation capacity of 38,327 rooms with an investment of LE5.9 billion.

Furthermore, eight locations for integrated tourism development projects were defined, of which three are in the Gulf of Aqaba region, two in the Red Sea area, one in Ras Sadr, one in Al-Arish, one in Ain Al-Sokhna, thus implementing projects with an accommodation capacity of 64,337 rooms (double the present capacity) and with an investment of LE8.2 billion.

1996 quality year for tourism:

The Ministry of Tourism plans to start taking serious practical steps to elevate the quality of tourism services, with special emphasis on the efficiency of tourism companies and hotel employees — as crucial ingredients in this process. The following proposal has been drawn up by the ministry:

— Organise training sessions to enhance the professional capabilities of those working in the tourism industry.

— Exert joint professional and scientific efforts by the ministries of tourism, education and the Tourist Chambers Union.

— Create tourism awareness within society, as an essential condition for improving the tourist industry.

— Improve the quality of all tourist services to compete with international standards. The Hotel Association should oversee this effort.

A view of medieval Cairo

ACCESS to the medieval city of Cairo could once be made through 60 gates, but today, only three remain. These gates, along with the *bayyut*, or houses, of distinguished *emirs* and high-ranking persons were built by the Armenian General Badr El-Gamali in the late 11th century, and are examples of 11th century Egyptian military architecture.

The first gate, Bab El-Nasr, stands at the northeastern corner of Fatimid Cairo. It consists of two great square towers which are solid for two-thirds of their height and flanked by a Romano-Byzantine arch. The towers are built in three levels, and the upper storey was added by Napoleon Bonaparte. To the rear of the gateway is a great square bay covered with a cross vault that forms a covered roadway between the towers.

Passing through Bab El-Nasr en route to the second gate, there are numerous souvenir shops selling everything from *hookahs* (waterpipes) to belly-dancer outfits, and silver-plated trays.

Bab El-Futuh is flanked by two rounded towers, the front part of which rests on a rectangular plinth and the gateway is particularly wide. The journey from Bab El-Futuh to Bab Zuweila winds through one of Cairo's most famous streets, El-Sagha, or the Street of the Goldsmiths, which dates back some three centuries. Also along this road is El-Attarine, filled with stores that sell fragrances and frankincense.

Bab Zuweila, the third of the great gates, marks the southern limit of the Fatimid city. It was once a place for executions and is famous for being the place where the notorious Mamluke Tumanbay was hanged. This gate is easily accessible because of its proximity to the Khan El-Khalili bazaars. It also leads to the famous bazaar of El-Khayameya, the "Tent-Makers."

Not massive, but by no means less interesting are the *bayyut*, which offer a glimpse into the lifestyle of medieval Cairo. A typical Ottoman house was a two-storey building with the lower floor characteristically dedicated to the *salamlik*, or men's quarters, and the upper floor to the *haramlik*, or women's quarters. The latter is embellished with *mashrabbiyas*, which are lattice-worked wooden windows. They allowed women to observe, unseen, the public events enjoyed by men in the street below.

Beit Al-Sehaimi, situated in Al-Darb Al-Asfar, an alleyway off Al-Muezz Street, is easy to find. At the foot of some stairs, one enters through a massive outer door and

then through a smaller doorway. From the rectangular courtyard, one can see the entrances to various halls, flanked by well-kept plants.

One of the most interesting rooms is devoted to Turkish pottery, and its walls are decorated with magnificent blue and white ceramic tiles. Others display a variety of equally precious objects, as well as traditional furniture and fittings of medieval Cairo. Beit Al-Sehaimi was named after its third owner, Sheikh Mohamed Ahmed El-Sehaimi, a famous merchant.

Another house that is worth a special visit is that of Gamaleddin El-Dahabi, a wealthy 17th century merchant. It is not far from the Al-Ghuri Mosque on Al-Muezz Street. The architectural details of this 1637 construction are similar, in many respects, to Beit El-Sehaimi. It has a marble fountain in the middle of the courtyard surrounded by a beautifully-fashioned floor made up of exquisite, symmetrical matching tiles of fine marble. This *beit* has ceilings decorated with gold and skillfully hand-crafted *mashrabbiya* screens and windows.

Beit Al-Harawi, the most recently inaugurated house in the Al-Gamaleya district, represents early Turkish architecture. It was recognised as architecturally significant at the time of Khedive Tawfik, and it was duly registered when the Arab Archeological Committee was formed. In 1937 Beit Al-Harawi was used to store Islamic monuments which were later transferred to the Islamic Museum. At the time, squatters moved into the house that was named after its last owner Abdel-Rahman Pasha El-Harawi, a physician at Qasr Al-Aini Hospital in the 19th century. The house has now been repainted in its original colours and includes a library of Islamic history and two halls, one for music and another for cultural seminars.

In Cairo's cemeteries there are at least 35 monuments of particular historical interest, including five complexes. The most well known is the complex of Qait Bey. The mosque is among the best preserved. Its vault is decorated with stripes of coloured masonry and carved with stuccos. There are marble floors, stucco and stained glass windows. According to many historians and archaeologists, the complex of Qait Bey is the most remarkable Islamic monument in Egypt, if not, in the Arab world.

Prepared by Rehab Saad, Omayma Abdel-Latif, Shorine Nasr and Nevine El-Aref and Edited by Jill Kamel



Beit El-Razazz, which once belonged to a high-ranking Mamluke official, is still standing strong

photo: Antoine Albert

Second perhaps in importance is the complex of Farag Ibn Barq. The first section built was the mausoleum of Barq. His son Farag completed the complex that would eventually encompass a mosque, four schools, a *khanga* (Sufi community centre), two *sabilis* (free water dispensaries), two *kutabs* (Qur'anic schools), and a mausoleum with two burial rooms — one for men and one for women. Its most striking features are the two minarets on its northwestern facade decorated with craved intersecting lines. Finally, a monument worthy of note is Al-Asfour dome, one of the most interesting Islamic monuments. Its name is fitting: in Egyptian Arabic, *asfour* means something of small proportions.

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Close up

Salama A. Salama

Conditions for democracy

The linkages between economic development and the consolidation of political freedoms are far from obvious. As a consequence they become, periodically, the site of controversy.

Certainly, there is a question mark over the extent to which democratic systems can succeed in the face of poverty and ignorance. Democracy, after all, is predicated on an integrated economic system and on the provision of minimum standards of prosperity, respect for the dignity of the individual and education, all of which presume the existence of resources which are, generally, lacking. Yet without the provision of these minimum standards there is no solid base from which to develop greater political participation or to establish support for the political and economic interest groups of which real political parties can grow.

Issues arising from these discrepancies were central to the discussion that took place during the Cairo book fair, between President Mubarak and assorted intellectuals and writers. Mubarak addressed the issue in a simple and clear manner, devoid of ideological or doctrinal prejudice.

"Political and economic liberalisation march in step," he said. "When economic progress is sufficiently realised, we will also have political openness. Establishing a solid and firm economic base allows political and democratic advancement to follow. The economy is the bulwark that will guarantee freedoms and greater democratisation, for political and economic liberalisation are two sides of the same coin."

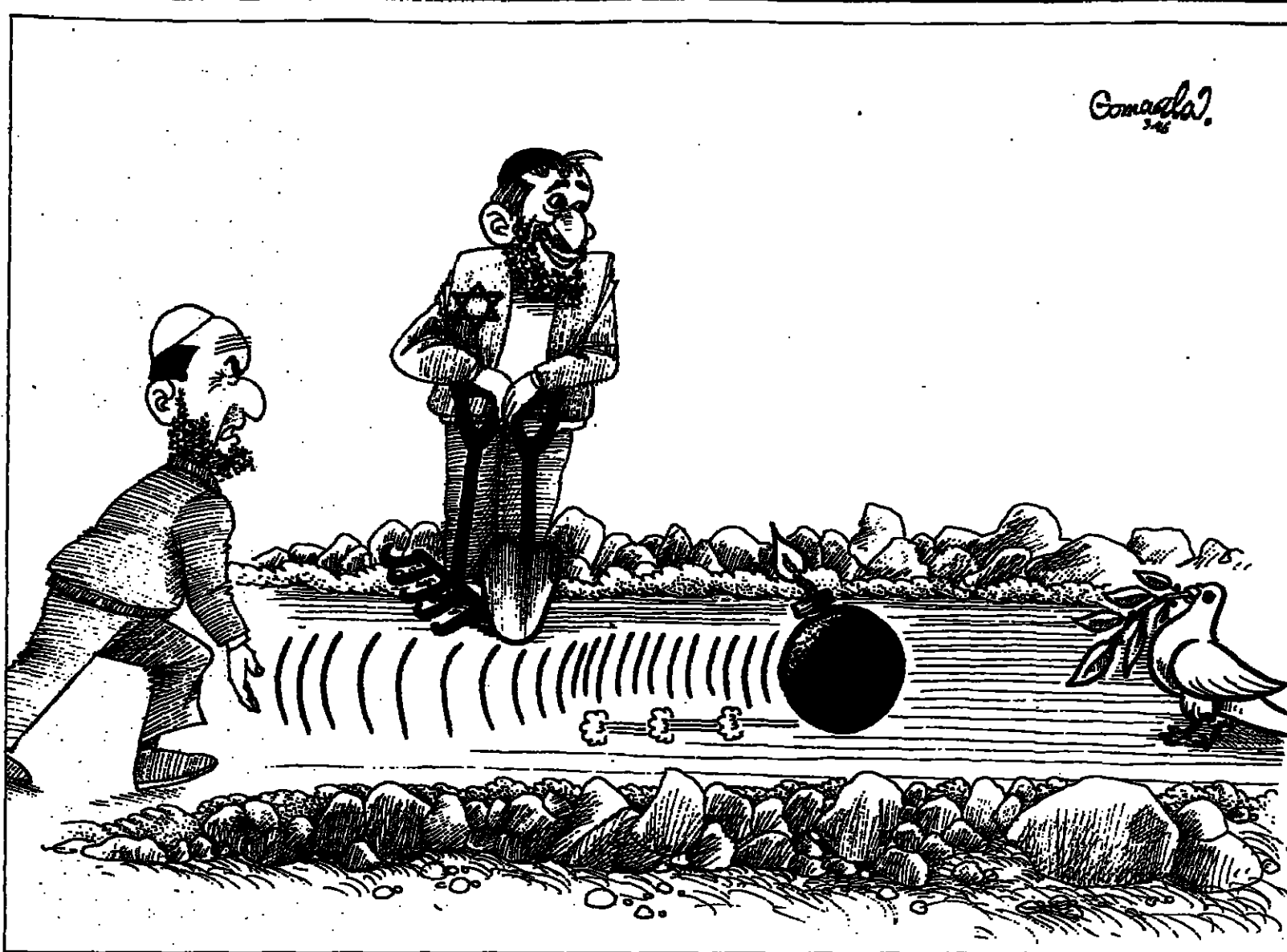
There is no disagreement over this view. The margin for freedom, after all, widens or narrows depending on the level of economic and social progress as well as on the levels of stability and development that a given society enjoys or lacks. It also explains the reasons behind the hesitation to amend the constitution, which still contains articles with an authoritarian stamp. It explains also the hesitation between openness and circumscription in the drafting of laws regulating freedoms of expression, the press and the formation of political parties.

Yet within this context it is worth taking on board the actual experience of those Southeast Asian countries generally referred to as the 'tiger' economies. These countries successfully engineered impressive levels of economic growth achieving higher standards of living, education and income for their populations. Currently they enjoy both economic and social stability. To all intents and purposes they have managed to bridge the development gap that separated them from the advanced West. Yet they have still to consolidate the kind of solid, democratic institutions capable of guaranteeing political freedoms and ensuring the transfer of power through sound parliamentary procedures.

So how can we arrive at an equation capable of ensuring that further economic reform does not mitigate against hopes for greater political liberalisation?

There is likely to be a wide disparity in views over the answer to this question. The one thing we can glean from our own experience, and the experiences of others, is that democracy and political liberalisation do not happen overnight, nor do they spring from a vacuum. Democratisation is a lengthy process, a result of consistent political action instigated by leaders, intellectuals and decision-makers as they tackle crucial issues. Realising democracy, then, is dependent on the extent to which the political and intellectual elite believe in its values and abide by its rules, which include, of course, abandoning any monopoly over power.

We have only to examine the recent histories of Spain, Portugal and a host of Eastern European countries to realise that economic development need not present an obstacle to political reform and the implementation of democratic practices. Yet in Egypt democracy is stymied even at the level of the intelligentsia — an unfortunate phenomenon that is epitomised by professional syndicates and political parties. It is a discouraging and depressing scenario, though such knowledge as is such could well help us to pinpoint the core of the problem.



Comagha!

Soapbox

Shock tactics

The suicide bombings carried out by Hamas in Jerusalem, Ashkelon and Tel Aviv came some 50 days after the assassination of Hamas activist Yehia Ayyash, which in turn was preceded by the assassination of leading Hamas member Fathi Al-Shakaki in Malta. Coming also on the heels of the Palestinian self-rule elections, the bombings are intended to convey a twofold message to Israel. First, Hamas is seeking to establish that its words will be followed by deeds and that Israel cannot assume that it can assassinate the organisation's leaders with impunity. Secondly, Hamas wants it known that its boycott of the Palestinian elections has not harmed its influence or credibility.

It would be a great mistake for Israel to believe that in eliminating some of the leaders of organisations like Hamas it paralyses them. Another mistake, commonly made, has been the repeated attempt to hold the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) ultimately responsible for the bombings. Neither the PNA, nor any other authority, is capable of preventing or predicting such operations.

It would be far more productive if, instead of forcing inter-ethnic, Palestinian conflicts, the Israelis were to concentrate on speeding their withdrawal from the West Bank and to arrive at acceptable solutions to the outstanding problems included in the final stage of negotiations. That is, if they want to end the suicide bombings. But if the intention is simply to consolidate their own position as occupiers, and to weaken the hand of the Palestinian negotiators, then we can expect business as usual from Israel.

Ironically, behind the Israeli shock at the recent attacks lies their conviction that there is nothing wrong with the peace they are offering. Yet it is in the very nature of this peace that the germs of the growing spiral of violence are to be found. The continued destruction of houses, confiscation of land and funding of settlers, combined with delaying tactics on resolving outstanding issues, will act only to fuel violence on both sides.

This week's Soapbox speaker is an expert at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies and editor of its monthly Israeli Digest.



Abdel-Allim Mohamed

Dropping-out of the future?

Abdel-Azim Anis on the reasons why the primary education system constitutes the logical starting point for any educational reform in Egypt

Students enrolled in primary schools comprise more than half of those receiving public, pre-higher education. According to Ministry of Education statistics for 1994-95 there were 7.3 million students enrolled in primary schools, as opposed to 3.4 million in preparatory schools and 2.6 million in secondary schools. Add the approximately 750,000 students enrolled in Al-Azhar primary schools and we arrive at a figure of 8 million students receiving primary education in Egypt.

That education should, by rights, provide the essential storehouse of skills and knowledge upon which all subsequent branches of preparatory and secondary school training is based. According to the constitution, primary and preparatory — school education is compulsory and provided free of charge. It constitutes a primary asset in developing our human resources. Any waste of this asset, or flaws in the system that go into its making, are detrimental to Egypt's future, the future of a country, moreover, that is rich in few natural resources.

Primary school is the obvious level on the educational ladder where poverty and the thirst for knowledge meet most glaringly. Yet poverty is the greatest impediment to improving primary school education. Ironically, poverty, which in Third World countries is supposed to be alleviated by education, constitutes an insurmountable obstacle when it comes to improving primary level education.

One of the greatest channels of waste in our primary school system is represented by school drop-out rates. For the purposes of this article drop-out rates refer to students who withdraw from public education before completing the primary school level (and generally before fourth grade), so as to help support their families. This phenomenon, which constitutes an enormous obstacle in solving the problem of illiteracy, is common to all Third World countries. In Egypt it has become a focus for researchers.

Clearly, increasing expenditure on primary school education reform will do little to solve the real problems until a series of social measures are in place geared towards lowering dropout rates. In Brazil, for example, a law passed in the eighties obliged every state to allocate 25 per cent of its budget to education. As a result the number of children who joined school upon reaching school age (six years old) rose from 80 per cent to 95 per cent within ten years. Yet the actual impact of the law has been minimal, be-

cause half of the children drop-out before completing their primary education. In Pakistan, to take another example, the government allocates a relatively high percentage of national income to education (approximately 3.4 per cent), yet still 13 million children remain outside the system.

In Egypt, in the seventies, drop-out rates never exceeded 20 per cent. However, in 1993, according to a World Bank report, the rate had reached an average of 36 per cent. Moreover the rate had steadily increased over the past eight years. Not only do statistics concerning family budgets indicate an expanding poverty base of increasing severity, a UNESCO survey on primary school education in Egypt conducted in three governorates (Kafri Al-Sheikh, Cairo and Al-Minya) leads to an unavoidable conclusion — the growing number of primary school drop-outs do so in order to help support their families.

There are numerous criteria one can use to assess the efficacy of primary school training. Here, I will restrict myself to two. The first involves the calculation of an enrolment ratio and the relationship between this ratio and the drop-out rate. The enrolment ratio is the percentage of students registered in primary school education in a given year, in proportion to the number of inhabitants of primary school age (6-11 years old). The numerator of this equation is straightforward and incontestable — enrolment figures for a given year are listed in the records of the Ministry of Education. The denominator, on the other hand, is subject to controversy.

Supposedly one should be able to determine the number of school age children in 1994 between the ages 6-11 by performing a mathematical operation on the latest census, which was completed by the census bureau in 1986. The number obtained by such an operation, however, is based on several hypotheses that can be contested. A set of hypotheses may lead to unrealistically low number of inhabitants within the given age group, and in turn, an unrealistically high enrolment ratio.

The 1994 UN report on human development gave

the primary school enrolment ratio in Egypt as 95 per cent. The source for this figure was the Egyptian Ministry of Education. Given that such a ratio is generally achieved only in developed countries I believe it should be treated with scepticism, a scepticism, moreover, that is reinforced by the fact that a UNICEF study on primary school education in Egypt estimated the enrolment ratio for 1994 at 86 per cent. The study further states that the enrolment ratio in rural Egypt has declined drastically, particularly in Upper Egypt, and the enrolment ratio for girls of school age has dropped even more acutely.

The other criterion by which we can measure the efficacy of primary school training is by analysing the product, certainly in terms of the acquisition of the three essential skills: reading, writing and arithmetic.

The UNICEF study, conducted among 4,800 households spread over 16 rural and urban locations in three governorates, tested the acquisition of these skills in family members between the ages of 10 and 17 who had had primary school training.

The results justify anxiety over the state of primary school education in Egypt. Only 75 per cent of those studied completed primary school, yielding an average drop-out rate of 25 per cent. More shockingly, perhaps, the study revealed that the younger the individuals the higher the drop-out rates, which clearly suggests that the internal efficacy of primary school training (i.e. the completion of primary education) has been in consistent decline for at least the past seven years.

The study further showed that approximately 60 per cent of the students who had completed primary school education had also received some form of additional tuition, such as private lessons or supplementary group tuition. The study goes on to demonstrate a steady decline in the acquisition of the essential skills that should be acquired in primary school over a period of seven years (1988-93), one of the most important causes of which was the 1988 decision to reduce the primary schooling period from six to five years.

Thresholds of Fahrenheit 451

Cairo's annual International Book Fair wound up this week. But, warns Gaber Asfour, the publishing industry has fallen on hard times. So much so that book production, and its deficiencies, constitutes a national scandal

Both private and public sector publishers, in their own way, stifle originality and creativity. There is no place for originality or innovation in the private publisher's formula of quick profit for minimum outlay, while the public sector publisher, bureaucrats to the core, cannot comprehend the possibility of originality. Somewhere, in the shadows between these two, lurks the publisher-thief, who violates copyright laws indiscriminately, at the expense of both quality and profit.

Pity the consumer, then, whose needs are supposed to be served by these publishers. The book buyer is at once unprotected, and in the majority of Arab countries, wields limited purchasing power. Inflation, shrinking levels of production, poor distribution, outmoded production techniques — all of these prevent the consumer from acquiring the books he wants. Nor are his needs catered for by a public library service. In the Arab world the concept of lending libraries, provided by the municipality, workplace, institute of learning, mosque or even prison, has yet to take root. The National Library of Egypt, a country with a population of 60 million, has only 16 branches, i.e. one branch to serve, on average, the needs of 4 million people.

Which brings me to the political dimensions involved in the supply of books in the Arab World, where temporal political considerations still have a profound effect on what should constitute a permanent cultural heritage. The Sudanese reader, for example, is deprived of access to Egyptian literature as long as the two governments are at loggerheads. Iraqi literature is banned by many countries who seek to voice their opprobrium of the Iraqi regime by boycotting Iraqi cultural output. Literature, it would appear, will always be the victim of any chilliness in the political climate. Just try finding an Iraqi bookstand at any international book fair. The same applies to foreign, non-Arabic literature, which appears in bookstore windows overnight, and vanishes just as quickly, according to the political affiliations of ruling regimes.

Such speedy exits and entrances are intrinsically bound up with the activities of the national censor-

ship bureaus. I use the plural advisedly, because these bureaus are many indeed: in Egypt there is the Postal Censors Office which falls under the mandate of the Authority of Transport and Communications, the Information Censors Office under the Ministry of Information, the Security Censors Office under the Ministry of Interior, the Religious Censors Office, an arm of Al-Azhar, and the Office for the Censorship of the Arts under the Ministry of Culture. In addition to these official organisations there are too, the unofficial censors, groups of individuals who do more than make a public outcry against a particular book or writer. They take independent action, leading in some cases to threats of violence and even assassination. Bureaucratic red tape, tied into ever more complicated knots, is another face of literary repression. We dream of the day when export and import taxes on books will be lifted, when the prices of freight and transport are reduced and when printing materials and machinery receive some form of subsidy. The production of books, an enormously significant cultural activity, demands moral, administrative and financial support. Yet little, if any, help has been forthcoming so far.

The ignorance and transience of the bureaucrats is matched only by our educational institutions, which appear determined to inspire nothing but antagonism towards books and towards reading from the earliest possible age. The book, described by Al-Jabiz as 'a precious vessel of knowledge, replete with wit and wisdom, a receptacle charged with humour and gravity', has, if our educationalists are to be believed, become at best a frivolous item hardly worth the allocation of shelf space, at worst a dangerous item that must be approached with the utmost caution. Given the disdain displayed by our educational institutions towards fostering independent minds it is no wonder that reading is accorded such a low status. And if this is the attitude towards reading for academic purposes, imagine the attitude towards artistic works and reading for leisure.

In short, our educational institutions, the media and other organisations that purport to promote and value learning do nothing to foster the reading habit, or a

love of books, in our young. A person reading in order to while away the time in a train or a bus is a rare sight. When architects are commissioned to build a house, a school or a public building, a library is seldom included in the brief. Libraries, like gardens, are deemed unimportant. Books, like trees, have hardly entered the public's consciousness.

The Arab world boasts no publication comparable to the *London Review of Books*. Our newspapers contain no supplements containing the latest bestseller lists, let alone reviews of all noteworthy new titles. The only books that sell more than 5,000 copies are those that receive 80 per cent subsidies on their production costs, as was the case with *Alam al-Mawrid* (the World of Knowledge), which had a print run of 20,000, or those with authors of the stature and repute of Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, whose latest work was issued in a print run of 20,000 copies by Al-Ahram Organisation. Yet 20,000 copies is a relatively modest figure when compared to the print runs of foreign publishers.

It is amusing, and sad, to learn that we have a Publishers' Union. And once in a while one of its members appears on our TV screens to voice his own daydream — that someday, somehow, his work will make a contribution to our cultural life. Yet concrete achievements are hard to find — no new literary magazines, no breakthroughs in production standards, no coherent system of discounts to retailers.

We are in the midst of a cultural crisis of serious proportions. The embarrassingly low numbers of books we produce ourselves, translate from foreign languages and, most importantly, perhaps, actually read, places us in the fourth not third world. And this is backwardness, not underdevelopment.

Western intellectuals and academics point to the diminishing importance of reading as a result of the cinema, television and other more recent advances in communications technology. Such doomsday soothsayers may well be barbers of a cultural and intellectual crisis. However, when one considers the appalling low print runs for books intended for a readership that stretches from the Atlantic coast to the Gulf — a readership that, furthermore, has access to vast amounts of oil revenue, one realises that there can be no room for complacency. To argue otherwise is simply to delude ourselves further.

The writer is secretary-general of the Supreme Council for Culture.

Saadi Youssef, in Cairo to give a poetry reading at the book fair, speaks to Hala Halim about the poetics of space, while Ahdaf Soueif talks about the space between cultures in which she works

Fear of falling Pillar and post



"The twilight imagery in my urban poems comes primarily from my conception of the text and the fact that I try to situate it in what might be called the grey zone... the critical site of work, because it is at once temporary and transient"



"There are people who think and dream in two languages, so it is not that they have chosen to write in one of the two languages, but that one has imposed itself... it is generally accepted that their work has enriched literature written in English"

"The importance of cities derives primarily from the importance of place. The poetic text cannot just be set in space, it must inhabit that space. I always fear that the poetic text remains suspended in a void. I remember seeing a little boy — the son of a friend — drawing. And always he drew a line under his pictures. When I asked him why he did it, he said: 'I am afraid that if I don't, the picture will fall into a hole.' His view makes sense to me. I too want the text to be situated in a space, to be defined by a place, though the nature of my lifestyle is such that the place changes. Hence the importance of cities in my poetry."

"I have lived in so many cities, and have wanted to know each of them inside out. I have wanted, always, to belong wholly to the city in which I was living, not out of any desire for belonging but the better to serve the text that I should some day write."

"There is no antagonism in my relationship with the city in the way that, in some poets, there is the dichotomy of city versus village. The countryside is associated with my childhood and it will remain, always, a source on which I can draw. But the countryside exists for me as a vision and has never come to constitute a rural world view. There is a vocabulary derived from nature, but not a vision of life or its relationships."

"Such eschewing of the dichotomy of countryside versus city has everything to do with my being a Marxist. The city is a function of urbanisation, it is a step forwards from the countryside. And then there is the fact of my early readings in fiction. The novel was born out of the urban experience. My approach to the countryside and city is, then, really a product of my intellectual orientations and readings."

"I love cities. I create my own map of the city — create slowly — and this map becomes my guide. I acquaint myself with the whole city, though there are certain details and aspects which I use as a point of reference. There is always a totemic aspect to cities — Paris and the Eiffel Tower, Athens and the Acropolis, though I do not pursue this totemic aspect, searching instead for the particulars, qualities and details that inevitably make their way into my text."

"The spirit of place is the outcome of the merger of the imaginary, the inherited, and the cultural with the daily and concrete. The daily and concrete rise and merge with history and memory. In my Paris poems, published as *Shajar Ithaca* (Ithaca Trees), I was searching out certain things. I wrote, for example, about a bar in Paris that I never entered. I was simply familiar with the sign of the place."

"Later I began a process of distancing myself from the place, a distance operating on various levels. I wrote about the beginnings of movement in the street in the early morning, of how the girl who works in a shop leaves her flat in the morning in the cold, how she warms her hands by holding a cup. I

register these details and know how the girl yearns to stay in the café listening to music, how she wishes this were a day off. From the city I attempt to register what I will find useful to register, and this is necessarily a selective registration, edited by the belief that the city could be more beautiful, and that its inhabitants could lead more beautiful lives."

"Yes, it is perhaps true that the cities that appear in my writing can be said to be my cities. Some of them, like Wahren, are extinct. The Wahren that is in my memory, in my text, no longer exists. Marakeh is a very different city from the city that emerged through my texts. Nine months ago I visited Al-Falakiyah, the part of Beirut where I once lived, to find it a ruin of its former self. There was not a trace of the life I lived there. The bars had become clothes shops. The café I had written about was a garage."

"The twilight imagery in my urban poems comes primarily from my conception of the text and the fact that I try to situate it in what might be called the grey zone. In bright light there is little to be worked on; likewise, in darkness, in pitch black, you cannot work for long. Where it is neither dazzling, nor too dark, it is possible to work at leisure, illuminating slightly, darkening slightly. The grey area is the site, the critical site of work, because it is at once temporary and transient."

"The first thread I followed in the streets of Alexandria was the thread which led me to the house of Cavafy. It led me to his flat, before it became a museum, led me to the last of the Greek tavernas in Alexandria, led me to the Elite restaurant where I met the proprietor who was his friend, led me to that famous pastry shop. It was thus I evolved my relationship with Alexandria, thus I read the city and related to its cultural history. And it is through a similar approach that I relate to both Paris and Marakeh."

"I lived in Cairo much longer than in Alexandria. There was a time, a long while ago, when I lived in Cairo. Then I would wander in the old quarters of the city. But I have yet to establish a part-mythical, part-real relationship with Cairo. And I never force such things. Such relationships must come in their own time, when I feel the need to write about them and document their shape through writing."

"Perhaps it is possible that if I were to live in Cairo for six consecutive months I might recreate its spirit, though I suspect it would take a longer stay. It would take a lot of wandering around, of sitting in cafés and chatting to customers — people outside the circle of intellectuals. It could only be done very slowly. Old cities like Cairo cannot be written about by someone passing through. To do so would be to transgress against their truth. It would act against the nature of the poetry to which one aspires, poetry that demands you be suffused by its material."

As an Arab woman living abroad and writing in English, how do you impose yourself on the West?

This question was put to novelist Ahdaf Soueif at a meeting held at the Cairo International Book Fair's Cultural Café. That East-West issues, in their various guises, together with questions of translation should have so dominated the discussion was in some ways inevitable for Soueif, the author of *Aisha* and *Sand Piper*, collections of short stories, and of *In the Eye of the Sun*, a critically acclaimed novel, counts among that band of writers from former colonies who choose to write in English. In Soueif's case very little of her writing has been, as yet, translated into Arabic. The inaccessibility of her works then, might account, at least in part, for the nature of the questions voiced at the meeting.

Certainly the meeting brought to the fore the scepticism with which writers working in a language other than their mother tongue are inclined to be viewed. One questioner, after announcing that he had not read her work, asked Soueif to comment on the designation "derivative" which "critics have used to describe writers like Wole Soyinka, who, in choosing to write in English adopt the language of the Other — the master."

"There are people who think and dream in two languages, so it is not that they have chosen to write in one of the two languages, but that one has imposed itself", she explained.

"There are many bilingual writers. The richest literature in English at the moment is being written by writers who are not English. Ishiguro is Japanese, Salman Rushdie, Indian, I, an Arab, write in English. Indeed, there exists an entire generation writing in English who are not English, and it is generally accepted that their work has enriched literature written in English."

Soueif has reservations about translations of her work, and in discussing them highlights aspects of the literature she produces that might be characterised as the negotiation between two cultures.

"It may be that the work, though it is written in English, assumes in many parts that the reader also knows Arabic. The work and technique negotiate a site between the two languages. Once translated into Arabic, though, it becomes a text from an Arab consciousness, written in Arabic and the tension implicit in the original is lost."

Despite such misgivings Soueif is keen that her work be read in Arabic by those who have no access to English. She is currently overseeing the translation of a number of short stories drawn from *Aisha* and *Sand Piper*. While finding it hard to translate her own work, she has so far found that when she sees her work in Arabic "except when translated by my mother [Professor Fatma Moussa] she always feels that, despite 'the technical accomplishment of the translation, something is lost'. The solution she has hit upon is to take a basic translation and edit it — a process she finds very time consuming but "enriching as an experience."

Asked in an interview two days after the seminar if she thought the questions posed a couple of days earlier had re-

vealed a gap, an absence of covalence between such multi-cultural writing and a combative "East versus West" vision whereby such texts are seen as alien and suspect, Soueif's response was mild.

"It is rather odd. But the novel that springs to mind is Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Marya* (Love in Exile). Now that is as much a transcultural novel as *In the Eye of the Sun*, and it is written in Arabic. So maybe for the reader in English it has been happening for much longer and the reader is more practiced in accepting it. I think that is all there is to it. I do not think there is a deeper problem."

"*In the Eye of the Sun* is a novel written with an Egyptian consciousness, but obviously since it is written in English it presupposes certain things. For instance, it presupposes an ignorance of the events of the six-day war. [If the whole novel were to be translated in to Arabic] I think, for example, that this section would be cut down... because you can assume that your Arab reader already knows a certain amount about the war. There would be editorial changes like this... though now I could not say how many. It is only when you are actually working on things that something tells you this should stay, this should go, perhaps because it is only when you are working on things that you re-imagine it from an Arab rather than an English-language point of view."

Having written her major work of fiction in a semi-autobiographical mode, in which direction does Soueif see her work developing: straightforward autobiography or fiction? At first, Soueif who has a self-confessed aversion to labels, tempers the term "semi-autobiographical".

"There is a degree of autobiography there in that I've used the contexts that I know and also in that you could say that the central consciousness in the book is mine as it was then, when I was 18 and 20."

"People start with the semi-autobiographical, as if you want to rid yourself of it... and then you can turn to other things. In my latest book, *Sand Piper*, the stories that were written after the novel move away from the autobiographical to the extent that the narrators of two of them are Western women. You find a seed of personal experience in them, but much more elaborated."

Soueif's second novel, on which she is currently at work, is described by its author as a "complete fiction." "You've tried out your wings and now you want to take off into something more unknown. Maybe when I'm 70, if I live to be 70, I'll write a memoir. But I find it more interesting to write fiction, to take a tiny seed of what could be in a memoir, and then work on it to create something new."

"May be living away from home makes me able to see more clearly how attached I am, it gives that dimension to the work. So that home is very present to me, very sharp in my mind in a way that it might be diffused or blurred if I were living here and taking being here for granted. It gives an edge. That edge in my real life is something that gives me pain, but I think it gives something to the writing, and I value that."

From the outside in

Mahmoud El-Wardani attends a discussion of the implications of a study of censorship in Egypt between 1952 and 1981, recently translated into Arabic

Last week the Cairo International Book Fair dedicated one of its Cultural Café meetings to a discussion of Marina Stagh's book on the limits placed on the freedom of speech accorded to creative writers under both Nasser and Sadat, the occasion being the appearance of Stagh's 1993 thesis at the University of Stockholm in an Arabic translation brought out by Sharqiat.

The panel, discussing the work comprised Professor Salah Fadl of Ain Shams University, the novelist and short story writer Hala Halim and Tala' El-Shaib, translator of the book. The panel were agreed that Stagh's study constituted a valuable contribution to the sociology of literature, while at the same time serving a useful function in focusing attention on the conditions of literary production in Egypt between 1952 and 1981. And much of the value of Stagh's work, Fadl insisted, could be attributed to the rigour of her conceptual framework.

"Upon finishing the book," he said, "I asked myself why it was that such work had not been undertaken by an Egyptian?" Part of the answer he gave lies in the

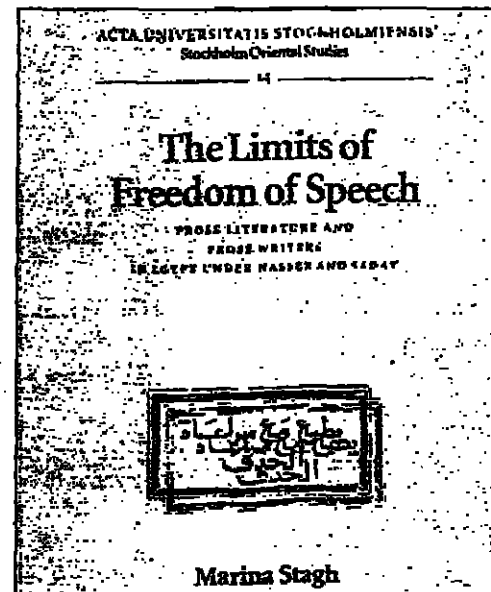
point of departure behind Stagh's choice of the subject of her research. "She began her research with a firm belief in the necessity of freedom of speech, and that it is every writer's right to give free reign to the imagination." Yet Arab researchers, he argued, "have become accustomed to all sorts of restrictions to the extent that they do not seem to be able to conceive of writing free of restrictions."

Fadl also highlighted the relevance of the period dealt with in Stagh's work, pointing to the fact that her point of departure, 1952, coincided with the rupture with the old multi-party system, while her focus on the 1970s coincided with attempts to widen the margin of civil liberties. Fadl concluded with the observation that until that margin becomes wider, a widening that can result only through a collective struggle for freedom of expression, studies such as that produced by Marina Stagh will continue to be monopolised by Western academics.

That Marina Stagh dealt with the subject of her study from the perspective of a Westerner accounted both for its strengths and some of its limitations, argued Hala Halim. Being an outsider, Stagh was able

to deal with the intellectual battles of the period with an objectivity that would have been difficult for those who were themselves participants in the events. Such objectivity, though, has a flipside, for the distance that makes it possible also mitigates against the ability to separate fact from fancy when it comes to processing material gleaned from interviews with those involved in the events of the time.

Stagh, Osman argued, also found difficulty in assessing the work of those writ-



ers who, by utilising intricate devices, managed to say things the censors would rather have left unsaid. The sociological rather than literary focus of the study inclined Stagh towards lumping literary genres together. No attempt is made to distinguish between genres, nor to establish the quality of the writing since all texts are dealt with as case-studies in censorship. Hence Stagh is able to treat a

novel by Naguib Mahfouz in the same manner as one by Mustafa Mahmoud. But, such reservations apart, Osman concluded by em-

phasising the value of the study, not only to outsiders wanting to know something about the conditions of literary production in Egypt, but to Egyptians who could profit from its methodological rigour.

Unfortunately that rigour, as Fadl pointed out, was stymied by the absence of any accurate data base. One of the useful revelations of Stagh's study, Fadl continued, was its exposure of the inadequacy of existing bibliographies. In her research, Stagh made recourse to three different bibliographical studies of the period, only to reveal their confusion.

Both Fadl and Osman pointed to the very high quality of Tala' El-Shaib's translation. The translator, obviously pleased with the praise, courteously insisted that it should be shared by the author, who gave him access to the Arabic texts of all her interviews, as well as copies of correspondence with her various sources. Thus, El-Shaib explained, the confusion in what is sometimes said by some interviewees cannot be attributed to Stagh's failure to understand what was said, but was a result of uncertainty on the part of the writers themselves.

Plain Talk

The 6th Cairo International Festival for Children's Films has just ended. Like a great many other things concerned with children, the festival did not get the media coverage which it merits and which Cairo International Film Festival, for instance, receives every year. Perhaps this lack of coverage was due to the fact that the festival was overshadowed by the Cairo International Book Fair with which it coincided, or maybe it was simply the result of a feeling of nonchalance on the part of the media.

Activities geared towards children are, it seems, destined to be neglected, a position that appears to be at odds with the attention currently being paid to the importance of educational reform. We talk endlessly of schools, and their problems, but appear reluctant to accord any publicity to those many extra-curricular activities that might mitigate against an impoverished primary education.

By all criteria, the festival was a great success, with 29 countries presenting the best films they had produced in 1994-1995. It was a real pleasure for those of us involved in children's culture, to see films made for children at a cost as high, if not higher, than adult feature films. For example, *The Magic Book*, a German-Czech joint production based on a fairy tale and which won the Children's Jury Prize, had a budget of two and a half million dollars.

One important entry in the competition was a 90-minute feature film, *The Riddle*, by Syrian director Layali Badr. The first of its kind to be produced by an Arab country, the film to my mind is an example of the kind of film that teenagers would like — a mixture of science and adventure. Judging by the response of the young audience, it was far from boring. Badr has proved herself to be a director who understands young people's likes and dislikes and who hence gives them what they really want. Her film won the silver prize in the TV programmes' competition and the third prize of the Arab Council for Children and Development.

In addition to the films shown, a number of press conferences and seminars were held on the occasion of the festival. The former were given by the directors or producers of films. During the discussions some interesting facts emerged. Bob Entrop from the Netherlands (the director of *The Other End of the Tunnel*) told us that in his country there is a government fund for films, out of which 10 per cent is earmarked for children's films. His own film deals with the problem of gambling among teenagers, through the slot machines which are common in Holland. According to Entrop, films for children should, first, be entertaining and then deal with the problems faced by the age group they target.

Brian Perkins from Britain spoke about her experiments in organising workshops for children, training them in scenario writing, directing, decor, lighting and all the processes involved in the production of a film. The experiment was successful and the children are now responsible, under Perkins' supervision, for the films produced by her institution.

A series of seminars was organised by the different institutions dealing with children. The Arab Council's seminar was about the creation of an Arab cartoon character, the Egyptian National Council for Childhood and Motherhood discussed the issue of a special TV channel for children; the National Council for Child Culture dealt with folk tales in children's films; while the TV and Radio Broadcasting Corporation's seminar was about creating an Egyptian cartoon character. All the seminars were thronged by those working in the field of children's films — the event gave them a forum from which to air their views.

The Arab Union of Artists, jointly with the Arab Council for Children and Development organised a competition for stories and scenarios for children's films. Six entries won the prizes and the works were sent to different departments for production. The next festival, and which looks promising, will have six feature films.

One important fact emerged clearly from the discussion: films that target children as their audience should be financed either directly by the government, through an appropriate agency, or else by one of the existing agencies within the Ministry of Culture, which should be allocated special funds.

Mursi Saad El-Din

On the eve of International Women's Day, Dina Ezzat reviews progress and setbacks in Egyptian feminist action on the ICPD, and against FGM

Going beyond conferences

Sa'diyah is the type of women always referred to and talked about in international and national conferences on women and social development. And like many of these women she knows, little, if any about these conferences.

Recently, under the auspices of the Egyptian NGO Steering Committee, a symposium was held to follow up on the implementation of the Programme of Action (POA) of the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) that was held in Cairo in the autumn of 1994. The symposium was attended by Nafsa Sadik, secretary general of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, Ismail Sallam, minister of health and population, Aziza Hussein, chairperson of the Egyptian NGO Steering Committee and a large number of representatives of NGOs. But none of these names ring any bell for Sa'diyah. As a matter of fact, she does not really remember the conference itself. Her only recollection about the international event is that "it was a time when there were so many foreigners in Cairo and when streets were very clean".

Sa'diyah was born eldest to nine other brothers and sisters that she had to help, her mother, bringing them up, and, her father, providing for them. This meant that while she had to help with the house work, she also had to get a job as a cleaner to bring in money.

At the age of 19, her father forced her into marriage because he wanted more room in his place. "He said most of his kids were girls and he wanted to try and have more sons," she said.

Sa'diyah's hard and impoverished childhood, denial of education, unpaid house work and violation of reproductive rights are all discussed, at length, in the POA; and so is the need and the ways to abolish these misfortunes.

And while, the "ICPD+1" symposium was discussing ways of empowering women, Sa'diyah was recovering from the side effects of an abortion that her father forced her to undergo after her marriage sadly collapsed when her husband decided to divorce her and to go work in a Gulf state.

Indeed, the two day symposium rightly noted that so far the implementation of the programme of action has been confined to strategy-making. "We have a lot of work to do before this programme of action become a reality," Hussein said.

Making the programme of action reality in Egypt would mean that girls, like Sa'diyah, would not have to be a neglected member of a very large family, nor would they have to be denied education for lack of money or forced to marry or abort against their will. It would rather mean that the government would invest more in making education and health care available for all. It would also mean that the government would encourage NGOs to play their role of advocating women's social and reproductive rights.

"So far it has only been strategy making," agrees Mary Asaad a veteran NGO worker. "But I think one could safely say that we are moving in the right direction: Sure, we cannot really say that we actually started the serious implementation, but at least now we are starting to sense a general awareness of women's social and reproductive rights," she added. According to Asaad, "if nothing else the official adoption of the programme of action has given the



Women are taught small crafts to supplement their families' incomes

photo: Mohamed Lotfi

efforts of the NGOs working in the fields of reproductive health the legal perspective. Take the example of the battle against female genital mutilation," she stated. "This is something we have been working on for many years, but now that the government has signed to a document that encourages its abolition, things are different".

The International Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994. Delegations from 179 states were continuously lobbied by hundreds of NGOs from the South and North as they took part in negotiations to finalise a programme of action on population and development for the next 20 years.

The 115-page document, adopted by acclamation on 13 September, endorses a new strategy which emphasises the numerous linkages between population and development and focuses on meeting the needs of individual women and men rather than on achieving demographic targets.

Key to this new approach is empowering women and providing them with more choices through expanded access to education and health employment.

The programme of action includes goals in regard to education, especially for girls, and for further reduction, of infant and maternal mortality levels. It also addresses issues relating to population, the environment and consumption patterns.

"I do not think that the document [POA] has been studied well up till now," said Dr Maher Mahran, rapporteur of the Higher Council for Population. In his point of view, "One year is a very short time to start the implementation of the document in which 'tremendous efforts were put.' Mahran, who was the minister of population from October 1993 till January of this year, is confident that it would not be long before women across the country start to feel the positive impact of the implementation of the POA. Added Mahran, "We did not sign the document for the purpose of joining a ceremony. We are very serious about implementing it".

During the two day ICPD+1 symposium reports were reviewed to assess the efforts and money that have been put to make the programme of action work. All news sounded positive.

But some NGO representatives at the meeting

sounded skeptical. Their concern was that news is good as far as family planning goes and not as far as women's reproductive health is concerned. They argued that making more IUDs, or injectables available is not necessarily a step forward on the road of granting women their much wanted reproductive rights. "What really matters is to make those contraceptives available for women who want them. Make sure that they can access them when they need them. But it is no good to enforce contraceptives on women just because the government wants to limit the annual birth rate," said one critic.

She added, "The good thing about the ICPD is that it did not concentrate on the numbers but rather on the lives of the human beings behind the numbers. The task is to stick to this line."

"The ICPD+1 is only one step that should be followed by many more," said Mona Zulfikar, deputy chairperson of the Egyptian NGO Steering Committee. "But, it was an opportunity to assess performance, at least at the level of strategy making."

As the fight against female genital mutilation continues, a new medical study stresses the role of health workers in eradicating the practice

An everyday nightmare

For many women, female genital mutilation (FGM) — also known as female circumcision — is just a fact of life. But what may seem standard practice is, in reality, often a nightmare.

Laila Rizgallah, in a recent Ph.D. dissertation, argues that some 55 per cent of a sample of 102 women must endure traumatic pain, acute urinary retention and hemorrhage as a result of FGM, and around 45 per cent are forced to live with urinary tract problems, anal fissure and a range of gynecological disorders. Rizgallah affirms the need to combat a practice that "constitutes a significant health problem to the social and psychological status of women".

Rizgallah's dissertation explores the medical, psychological and social aspects of female genital mutilation and argues that the brutal ritual, customary among over 80 per cent of Egyptian families, must be combated through a comprehensive awareness campaign "to make people aware that this is harmful... and that it should be stopped".

Rizgallah, who began her research four years ago, found that "the subject of female circumcision, which has been buried in secrecy and taboo for several generations, needs to be addressed from a medical point of view." Her choice of topic was prompted by a "genuine concern to shed light on a serious problem that needs to be immediately confronted".

Rizgallah's research involved dozens of interviews with circumcised married women. The women, selected from different age and social groups, answered questions that covered their experience of mutilation, their views on reproductive health and rights and the problems within their marital relations.

"For the most part, I found that, motivated by love and concern for their daughters' well-being, well-meaning women have perpetuated a custom that has no medical or religious origins whatsoever," Rizgallah says.

But FGM, which entails partial or total removal of the clitoris and in some cases the labia minora and majora, is a practice that causes serious psychological and sexual problems. "Out of 102 women, I found that 80.37 per cent suffer from a whole range of sexual problems, of which frigidity is the most common," she remarks.

The practice is advocated as a way of guaranteeing that girls remain chaste before marriage and faithful thereafter. The results are often horrifying. "In one case a girl died," Rizgallah says. "The mid-wife who circumcised her did such a bad job, with unhygienic tools, that the lower tract was blocked and menstrual blood was trapped in the young girl's womb for months. Her family thought she was pregnant and they killed her, only to discover later that she was only suffering the side-effects of what they forced her to endure."

But Rizgallah was most shocked by her discovery that some medical doctors insist on carrying out the ritual of FGM. "We did not study anything about FGM in medical school. So these doctors are simply carrying on a practice which society taught them is good for women. This is why it is very important to start educating people about it," she says. "The facts should be made available to all men and women alike, so that they can stop bringing these problems onto themselves."

The campaign Rizgallah advocates should include the introduction of introductory courses in school curricula, encouraging an anti-FGM stance in the media, and convincing religious figures in mosques and churches to speak out against the practice and to stop describing it as a religious ritual. "But most important of all is to teach medical students about the matter and help local mid-wives realise the serious side effects of this practice," she said.

The immediate target of this campaign, Rizgallah suggested, should be to delay the age at which girls are "circumcised". Girls between five and nine years of age are usually the victims of FGM. At this age, Rizgallah said, the girl's sexual organs are still not fully developed; this makes it easy for a mid-wife to cut off a substantial part. If not all, of the

clitoris. Meanwhile, "girls who are a little older [between nine and 14] are more developed; the clitoris is more hidden, so it is no longer so easy for the mid-wife to cut so deeply," she explains.

At its intermediate stage, the campaign targets educated sectors of society in the hope that these will be the first to give up the practice altogether. The long term target is to eradicate the practice altogether. "Of course this is not an easy job. It is going to take a very long time," Rizgallah says.

The practice of female genital mutilation came into the limelight in Cairo in October 1992, when the American Cable News Network [CNN] aired a tape of a young Egyptian girl struggling as a barber circumcised her. But non-governmental organisations concerned with women's reproductive health and rights have been fighting the practice for the past two decades. A decree by the former minister of health allowing the practice in public hospitals was retracted, less than a year after it had been issued, as a result of pressures exercised by these NGOs.

A task force, formed over a year ago to combat the practice, has also been working on a campaign similar to the one suggested by Rizgallah's study.

Sufra Dayma

Hawawshi loaf

Ingredients:

1/4 kg red minced beef
3 baladi loaves
One large onion (grated)
One large green pepper (finely diced)
One large tomato (skinned and finely diced)
2 bunches parsley leaves (finely chopped)
2 tbsp. butter (melted)
Salt+pepper+allspice+nutmeg+chili powder

Method:

Mix all ingredients together then open the baladi loaves, just a small opening to allow stuffing them with the mixture. After filling them well, cut each loaf into 4 quarters without reaching the bottoms of the loaves. Wrap each loaf with aluminum foil sheets separately and place them in a preheated medium oven for 45 minutes. Remove the foil sheets to allow loaves to colour golden, only for 5-10 minutes. Serve hot with a yoghurt salad and pickles.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Southern comfort

Nigel Ryan faces heaped portions and the odd surprise

Lucille's Country Kitchen is a relatively new venture — an American diner that has opened in, where else Maadi. So off I trekked to the suburbs, all in the cause of this column.

The place takes some finding for those unacquainted with Maadi's numerical streets. It is in Digla, which — these days — is hardly the wrong side of the tracks. For those in the know it is near Digla Market, which itself is near the Bedouin Market. You will recognise the place by the presence of a uniformed security guard.

Ascend the steps and you enter a squeaky clean interior, divided into smoking and non-smoking sections. On the way to the smoking section I encountered a blackboard on which was posted the day's important message — an apology that, owing one must suppose to supply difficulties, American beef bacon had been replaced by Canadian beef bacon. Though I know nothing of beef bacon, I felt miffed.

I sat in a booth and perused the menu. We had arrived five minutes too late for breakfast, which is not really very late at all. To compensate I ordered an orange juice.

The menu contains glowing descriptions of the food on offer. This is a southern diner, and consequently, it was explained, a great many dishes are doused in gravy. But though late for breakfast it was still relatively early, and so I avoided any dish described as smothered in either brown or white jus.

Still, there was soup of the day — which I ordered chiefly because it was accompanied by corn bread and honey whipped butter. The soup of the day was onion — passable, if a trifle bland and floury. The corn bread, though, was another story. Rich, golden and delicious: one suspects Ms Lucille could make her fortune by supplying Maadi with the stuff.

Soup was followed by a Philly steak sandwich, described as "tender strips of beef grilled with bell

peppers, onion, topped with melted Swiss cheese and served on a grilled bun. My companion had a Fried Chicken Salad with a similarly comprehensive description. "Strips of tender white chicken meat with a southern style dressing served on a bed of chopped greens with a choice of dressing." (She chose house garlic.)

The tender strips of beef in my sandwich turned out to be slices of roast beef. If they had been grilled is anyone's guess — though it seemed to me that they had, in fact, been reheated in a frying pan, together with the green pepper and onion. Nor was the bun grilled. Now the sandwich itself was perfectly fine — I am not carping about the quality of the food, merely the quality of the description.

The fried chicken salad came in what might have doubled as a pail. The southern style dressing I would have described as batter, but this may well have just been an example of cultural clash. In addition to the chicken, the salad contained copious quantities of crumbled cheddar cheese, balanced atop a mountain of lettuce, finely chopped red cabbage, and tomato.

There is nothing meagre about the portions served at Lucille's Country Kitchen. And the prices charged are far from exorbitant. What the place offers is an alternative — a very welcome alternative — to the plastic fare offered by Cairo's sudden plethora of fast food franchises. Service is efficient and friendly, and if the interior lacks atmosphere, it is certainly antiseptic.

I was tempted to scatter crumbs, but resisted: one more example of cowardice in the face of disapproval.

Together with orange juice, a bottle of mineral water, and a glass of Pepsi, the bill still came to less than LE46. There is no service charge. But there is that corn bread.

Lucille's Country Kitchen, 30, Road 213, Digla, Maadi. Tel 517 1185

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdenour

ACROSS

1. Culture medium (4)
5. Paved roofless area ad joining house (5)
10. Bile of animals (4)
14. Jar (4)
15. Districts (5)
16. Musical instrument (4)
17. Little devils (4)
18. Cheerful (5)
19. Deception (4)
20. Have a right to (7)
22. Tarry (6)
24. Christmas (4)
25. Trade in (4)
26. Packing box (6)
29. Soon (7)
33. Garden tool (3)
34. Lullaby: melody (5)
37. Rescuer (5)
38. Equip: girl one's loins (3)
39. Feverish (3)
40. Hail! (3)

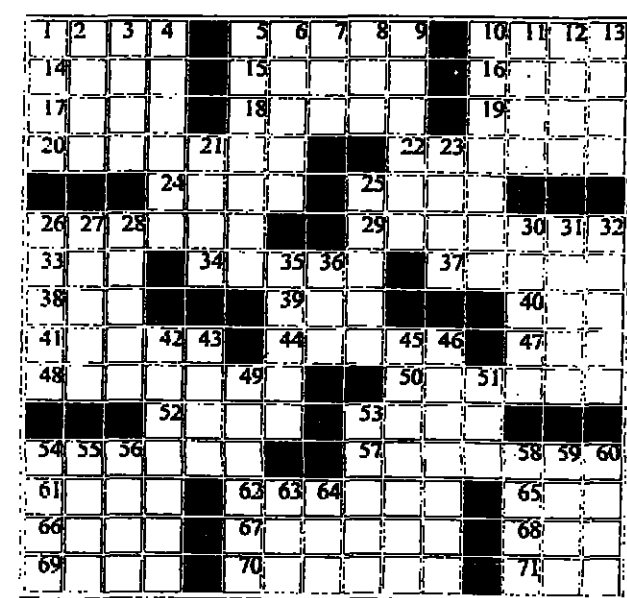
APHS CHAIR ASSIET
SORE RAIDE SITAIK
FELK ANZAL ULNA
VAISA HO INTER
SMWISH WEIRST
STACIN RTID TESH
EASIE BOO ELDERS
APHTOULINE NEBO
SEBAZA TENE LIMA
ERGO ANY SALON
INIEPHI LUNER
CONTEGE EMENT
FALIA EXAYE ERROS
FASILE EIVOT RTIDE
SNEER SITS NODE

LAST week's solution

41. Rung (5)
44. Piece let into dress (5)
47. Golf necessity (3)
48. Palatial residence (7)
50. Avant-garde (6)
52. Inequalities (4)
53. Calamitous (4)
54. Wired (6)
57. Workshop (7)
61. Type of vegetables (4)
62. Sharing with others (5)
65. Crystalline compound (4)
66. Watercourse conducting water to mill (4)
67. Declaim (5)
68. A young sow (4)
69. bare sandy tract (4)
70. Wrapped in canvas (5)
72. Mere existence (4)

DOWN

1. Avaricious (4)
2. Jolity: athletic event (4)
3. Small vipers (4)
4. Be in a huff about (6)
5. Person of obscure origin but having gained position (7)
6. Type of gazelle (5)
7. Pekoe (3)
8. Scot for "John" (3)
9. Stableman at inn (6)
10. Type of ape (7)
11. Connect (4)
12. Be defeated (4)
13. Glance at sideways (4)



21. The parlour or boudoir (4)
23. Spanish cheers (4)
25. Cabals (5)
26. Canyon (5)
27. Main artery (5)
28. Make courageous again (5)
30. Egg-shaped (5)
31. On no occasion (5)
32. Verdant (5)
35. Climbs up tree using arms and legs, not ladder (5)
36. Electrically charged particle (3)
42. Dissociate (7)
43. Travel by motor (4)
45. Poured forth (7)
46. Severed (4)
49. Casual isolated piece of work (6)
51. Inundation (6)
53. Author of "Divine Comedy" (5)
54. Heartless; chilled (4)
55. Tropical tree (4)
56. Husks of grain separated from flour after grinding (4)
58. Rainbow goddess (4)
60. Elongated fish, pl. (4)
60. Estimate (4)
63. ... pro nobis (3)
64. Suffix forming adjectives (3)



photos: Jihan Ammar

Every evening the purple sky, pierced by the tall minarets and buildings of the Al-Husseini district, becomes a playground for hundreds of avid pigeons who begin their daily flight of exercise and play. These grey and white birds fly in angelic patterns above their homes until dusk is overtaken by night.

When Hamdi, a pigeon raiser, holds up a black flag and waves it to and fro, his pigeons are signalled to ascend. It is usually the leader of the flock who initiates the flight, moving up slowly into the sky in narrow circles that eventually widen across the sky. The others follow closely behind. In groups of two or three they move upwards in almost the same way, until they, too, are high in the sky, creating a superb picture for everyone to see.

Hamdi, 27, stands overlooking the narrow alleys of Al-Husseini as a warm red light from a neon sign on an adjacent roof shines upon his abode. This rooftop is not only home to Hamdi and his 130 pigeons but it is home to the most peaceful and fulfilling moments in his life: "Nothing means more to me than seeing my birds fly gracefully and peacefully in the sky," says Hamdi, who also works at an office during the day.

There are many more like Hamdi. In fact, they are concentrated in the area extending from behind the

Citadel to the far end of Al-Husseini where there are hundreds of men, from traders to private sector employees to senior government officials, who love raising pigeons.

Raising pigeons for these men is only a hobby — not a profit-making activity. Very rarely are the birds sold and the sole reward for raising the birds is that sublime instant when the raisers stand looking in exhilaration at their birds in flight. "Raising pigeons is better than any other hobby," says Sayed, 35, who has been raising birds since he was eight. People learn virtues, such as how to be patient and how to take care of something well, through raising pigeons, he explains. The raisers feed their pigeons once a day, bathe them regularly and clean their cages when necessary, in addition to exercising them.

And just as only males are engaged in the hobby, only male birds are engaged in flight. "If the women are let out to fly they will create havoc," says El-Hagg Ateyah Hamouda, who has been raising pigeons for over 35 years. The males who fly must be kept away from females, so most raisers keep two sets of pigeons: couples which are bred to produce offspring and males that are raised only to fly.

"They are like children to us. We know each one

individually and can identify them even when they are flying," adds Essam, 34. "Pigeons are exactly like humans," claims Mustafa. "They get jealous of each other, can fight and even kill over territory and over females, and they are also susceptible to genetically transmitted diseases," he says, adding that this is why raisers try not to let pigeons from the same family mate.

The birds are let out to fly every evening from around three till just after sunset. New birds are not allowed to fly, however, because they must first get acquainted with their homes. After spending 20 days inside their cage and another two to three months roaming around outside it, they are let up into the sky. After this they can be left to fly freely and will return.

Pigeon-raising is regimented by traditions. If a bird flies into someone else's flock, the original owner cannot ask for it back, and in fact will feel ashamed that he did not raise his birds well. Also if the person who caught the pigeon wishes to hurt the original owner, he will slaughter it and send it back. However, this is not common practice.

Most raisers begin by buying a few pigeons and gradually increase their flock by either breeding or buying more birds. Pigeons are sold at markets

around central Cairo, such as the Friday market in Al-Sayed Aisha, behind the Citadel, from as little as LE5 to as much as LE5,000 a pair, depending on the species. The two main types of pigeon are *zagal* (carrier pigeons) and *zeina* (decorative pigeons, purchased for their beauty). If cared for properly, these birds can live for up to 15 years.

Following a long day caring for their birds, the pigeon raisers of Al-Husseini set out for another pleasurable, relaxing experience. After the call to the *isha* (evening) prayer is heard, they make their way to the Mohamed Hamdan coffee shop, more commonly known as the *ghawi el-hamdan* (those food of pigeons) coffee shop, in Dourass. The hobby of pigeon raising initially began in the Dourass, many raisers claim, and from there it has spread to the whole of Cairo and beyond.

On first sight the coffee shop is like any other, men drink tea, smoke *shisha* and chatter. But as you draw closer in and follow the private conversations consuming each table, distinct differences become clear. Although the raisers and breeders are aged anywhere between 20 and 60 and hold different full-time jobs, daily television series, family disputes, and cars are not topics of discussion. Instead it's all bird talk.



El-Hagg Hamouda: 35 years of breeding

The flash factor

Rolls Royce will soon tickle the fancies of the rich and elite, but as Sahar El-Bahr discovers, Mercedes is king

After film director Youssi Nasrallah attended a wedding where most of the guests drove Mercedes cars, he decided to make his film "Mercedes", starring Yousra. "They [the guests] were all ill-mannered. They drove their cars around as if they owned the country," recalled Nasrallah.

The concept behind the film, explained the director, underlines how Mercedes became a social icon symbolising power, influence, and wealth. But along with these qualities, Mercedes is also associated with corruption and class arrogance, pointed out Nasrallah.

Mercedes still makes as the number one symbol of status and wealth in this country. Its spell is so mesmerising that society is saturated with Mercedes pop culture. Who bought it for how much, and how are questions on the lips of everyone's tongues, the moment the luxury car whizzes by. And inventing nicknames for each model is by far Mercedes-watchers' favourite past-time.

Enad Hamouda, a Mercedes owner, recalled that when he bought his model S300, also known as *El-Shabbah* or the ghost, it was all the rage. "Everyone was speaking or writing about it," he said. Indeed, one journalist pointed out that the price of the car's ashtray is enough to feed 1,400 people and the price of one of its wheels equals the monthly salaries of 10 employees.

"I am sure that this criticism stems from hatred and will exacerbate class differences. This sort of resentment is rooted in jealousy of Mercedes owners, most of whom are successful investors and businessmen who participate in the development of Egypt," Hamouda retorted. Besides being used by some senior government officials, the Mercedes is bought by people who appreciate good cars.

But, even in jest, there are hints that the flashiness of such luxury cars does breed class tensions. "There is a measure of sarcasm associated with each Mercedes pet-name, often meant to describe those who purchase the cars as well," explained Mohamed Sabri, who owns a car repair shop.

Adel El-Sirafi, board chairman of the Egypt company for Auto Trading and the agent for Mercedes in Egypt, said these nicknames are unique to Egypt. What do the officials at the mother Mercedes dealership think? "These nicknames are brilliant publicity. The officials in Germany are pleased with this trend," said El-Sirafi.

And then there is the widespread myth that Egypt imports the most Mercedes in the world. But El-Sirafi said that in 1995, Egypt ranked number 35 internationally, after his agency sold 700 cars for a total of LE214 million — 136 million of which were customs duties. In 1982, Egypt ranked number 17 in international Mercedes sales, chalking up 3,000 that year. The early '80s, when the open-door policy began to bear fruit, were much more prosperous years for Mercedes sales in Egypt, noted El-Sirafi.

In fact, El-Sirafi said sales are gradually dwindling due to high customs fees. Out of a total one million cars in Egypt today, 55,000 are Mercedes. *El-Zalamoka* (stern), model 200, has been the biggest seller to date. *El-Shabbah* (model S300) takes second place and *El-Boudra* (heroin powder), model SL600, ranks as the third most popular Mercedes.

According to Ali Fahmy, a senior sociologist at the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research, an obsession with consumption drives many to spend millions on flashy cars. The open-door policy introduced by President Anwar El-Sadat in the '80s, saturated the Egyptian market with material goods.

In addition, Fahmy noted that the wealthy do not pay much attention to glaring class differences. As a result, the upper classes tend to be ostentatious. Believing themselves to be above the law due to their status and wealth, many "gold-diggers" resort to illegal means of earning money so they can continue their spending spree. Agiza, said Fahmy, they are more likely to purchase flashy cars in these instances in order to "live it up".

In Nasrallah's film *Mercedes*, one character philosophises: "There are two types of people: those who have a Mercedes and those who dream of having one. But I am dreaming of a Rolls Royce."



photo: Tarek Attia

"There are two types of people: those who have a Mercedes and those who dream of having one." And then there are these, like the owner of the donkey cart 280, above, who can laugh at other people's pretensions

Pigs and powders by the minute

A MERCEDES A MINUTE: Five hundred Mercedes a day, or almost one a minute, are manufactured worldwide. Below are some of the more popular models and their nicknames. Prices were obtained from the Egyptian agent and dealers for Mercedes.

- 200E (1976), *El-Khamsira* (The pig) LE200,000. With back wheels situated higher than the front ones, this model strongly resembles a pig
- 230E (1979), *El-Tensaha* (The crocodile) LE250,000. Frontal view resembles a crocodile.
- E200 (1984), *El-Zalamoka* (The stern) LE350,000. Resembles a turkey

from behind.

— S300 (1992), *El-Shabbah* (The ghost) LE300,000. Moves at "invisible speeds". Also dubbed ghost to denote something awesome and beyond the imagination.

— SL600 (1995/1996) *El-Boudra* (Heroin powder) LE1.25 million. More expensive than one kilo of heroin, which costs LE1 million. Also insinuates that such a huge sum for a car can only be easy money obtained illegally and thus its owners are likely to be drug smugglers or traders.

— 600 Sport (1996) LE500,000. Called "the woman with bold eyes"

A car with a history

WHEN England's Prince Charles visited Egypt last March, Rolls Royce took the opportunity to boost publicity for the introduction of the British luxury car to Egypt. Mobeen Fouad Tala'ea, the Egyptian agent for Rolls Royce, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the car will be available in Egypt this March. Based on Mercedes' whopping success in the country, officials at Rolls Royce decided Egypt would be a lucrative market. Indeed, within the first few working hours, the new agent received over 200 purchase orders.

While there are 55,000 Mercedes in Egypt, only 100 Rolls Royces have entered the country since 1950. According to Adel El-Sirafi, board chairman of the Egyptian Company for Auto Trading and the agent for Mercedes in Egypt, Rolls Royce sales are low due to the fact that the company had no representative in Egypt. Cost may be another factor since prices for a new one start at LE3 million.

Rolls Royce's entrance into the Egyptian car market is expected to boost the standard of luxury cars. As more and more people purchase Mercedes with newly found wealth, the car's status as signifying the *creme de la creme* of Egyptian society loses ground.

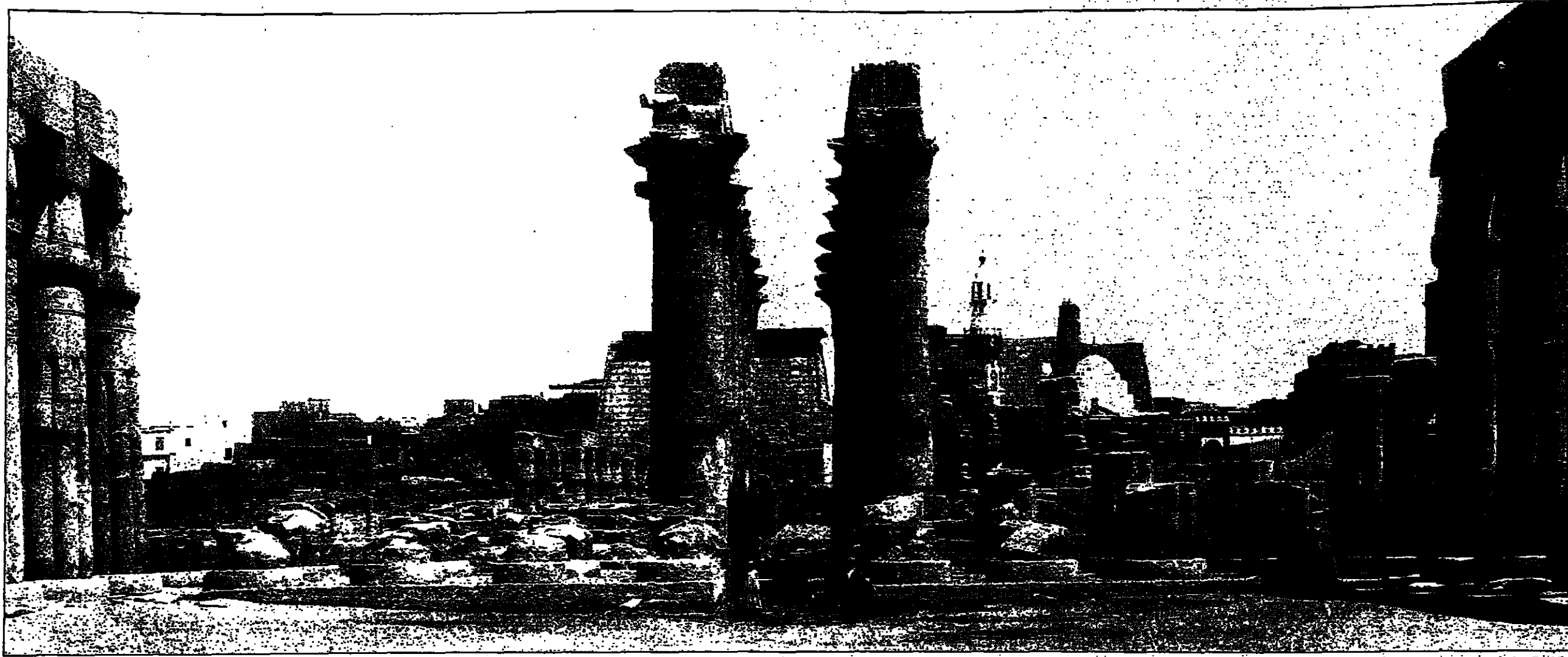
Tala'ea noted other distinctions: "The Mercedes has become a common car. But the Rolls Royce is handmade. It takes three months to complete while a Mercedes is manufactured every minute (500 a day)."

Tala'ea is certain of Rolls Royce's success in Egypt. "We have already received many demands from embassies, petroleum and tourist companies and businessmen. The marketing for Rolls is simply personal contacts," Tala'ea explains.

To avoid flaunting the flashy habits of the richer echelons of society, Tala'ea is not planning a major publicity campaign. There will be a large but private exhibition for the Rolls Royce. He added also that a massive state-of-the-art service station, the largest in the Middle East, will be built in Egypt.

Prospective buyers will have to submit an application for purchase. This measure, according to Tala'ea, is to assure that the owner will be of the same class as the car.

"I am sure that the buyers will be the elite and the educated, who know what genuine and authentic mean and what it means to buy a car with a history," he said.



A turn-of-the-century view of the Temple of Karnak

photo: Gaddis

Stemming decay 'New Luxor' nights

As the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) waterproofs, repairs and applies new conservation methods to protect Luxor's ancient monuments on both banks of the Nile, **Lyla Pinch Brock** makes a progress check

Luxor's top administrator has drawn up a priority list of projects and ideas, including new tourist sites east of the Nile and relocation plans to the west. **Rehab Saad** takes a look at what's in store

Still wary about the flood that devastated the Valley of the Kings on the Theban necropolis over one year ago, the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) has taken steps to prevent future disasters to ancient tombs and temples. The tombs of the Chancellor Bay, King Siptah and King Tausret-Semakhet, which were badly damaged during last year's week-long rains, have now been waterproofed by walls and doorways — installed along the path of any future floods.

The wall around the mortuary temple of Seti I, which had been washed away by the "wall of water" that rushed through the Al-Tarif area and into the temple, seriously damaging antiquities in its path, has also been rebuilt. But most remarkable of all, is the latest conservation work in Amenhotep III's Solar Court at the Luxor Temple. Last year, workers started to dismantle its leaning columns in an effort to stabilise them

by reinforcing the foundation. The dismantling of the columns was a considerably difficult process because they proved to be held together with ancient cement. As each segment was removed, it was

ing constructed and damaged parts of the columns replaced. The result will be a fortified reconstruction which will look exactly like the original. Mohamed El-Sagheer, director-general of antiquities for Mid-

east who built the temple. They had recorded their names as well as the dates they worked. These inscriptions are now being translated and published by the Luxor Inspectorate. According to Hassan Mohamed Khalid, an inspector who is studying the inscriptions on the original structure, the stone came from Gebel Silsila, a quarry 65kms north of Aswan.

Finally, a unique method of preventing water from seeping into the new foundation of the Solar Court has been devised by Ali Sabri, the SCA project consultant. A number of two metre wide cement rings, corresponding to the number of columns, will be filled with stones and sand to absorb any ground water, and placed beneath the columns. Luxor Temple was founded by Amenhotep III in the fourth century BC and extended by his successors, notably Tutankhamun, Haremhab and Ramses II. It was built expressly for the celebration of the Opet Festival.

Maj. Gen. Mohamed Mahmoud Youssef, the head of the Supreme Council of Luxor, says that he faces two main problems: Luxor's infrastructure and urban development on the west bank of the Nile.

The Nile hyphenates Luxor, as it does many cities along its valley. But the bulk of Luxor city is located on the eastern bank, which encompasses two major antiquity sites — the Karnak and Luxor temples. The western bank features the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens where scores of pharaohs and their spouses are buried. It is also home to the village of Qurna.

One of Youssef's plans is to build a "New Luxor" on the eastern bank of the Nile. Some 3,500 feddans will be allocated for this purpose. "All government and administration buildings will be moved from the banks of the Nile to this new site in the desert," says Youssef. The area will have a university with faculties of Egyptology, fine arts and language, and land along the corniche will eventually be sold to tourist investors, he says.

Luxor's look is also important to the major general: "Apart from the corniche, the streets are very narrow, unpaved and full of refuse," he says. He plans to build thoroughfares lined with greenery and to mechanise the garbage collection process: "We no longer want to depend on garbage collectors."

Luxor's eastern desert might also get

new visitor facilities. While multiple investments are being encouraged in that area, one proposed project is of particular interest to Youssef: a tourist village that caters to the handicapped: "Charitable organisations in Europe and the US organise trips for handicapped people, and naturally, they choose countries with proper facilities." The village will be built on 100 feddans and is expected to be completed in two years.

A health spa for businessmen, on the pattern of resorts in Romania and the Netherlands, is another project that Youssef is encouraging. He says that 50 feddans will be earmarked for the centre that he expects to be in operation as early as June 1997.

And, in order to tempt tourists into longer stays, a 25-feddan golf course is in the making and would include a model village that portrays aspects of Egyptian life — Pharaonic, Bedouin, Nubian and rural cultures. "It could be called 'Six Egyptian Nights'," says Youssef.

While the new head of Luxor is tending to the improvement of Luxor's hospital service and the expansion of the airport, he is also concerned with the western bank of the Nile. He says that the 100,000 residents of Qurna, who live above and among ancient tombs, will ultimately be relocated from this archaeological zone, to Al-Tarif. "The houses will be smaller," says Youssef, "but 300 feddans of land will be set aside for the construction of additional houses — for the offspring of the owners when they marry."



Restoration at the Temple of Seti (left) and the Valley of the Kings (right)



stored in an area to the north of the temple, near the entrance gateway. When the columns were completely disassembled, down to their bases, the SCA found that most were cracked, because the foundation blocks had been destroyed. This unstable foundation had caused the columns to tilt, making their condition perilous.

In this process, archaeological evidence about the building of the temple surfaced, and new methods were devised to conserve it. Bases are now be-

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The legendary Nile cruise

AS LUXURY cruises ply the Nile, today's tourists are discovering what travellers, historians and artists have known since medieval times, writes Jill Kamli. Travelling along the legendary river, with its fabled ruins and healthy climate, is a remarkable experience.

True, cruises on Lake Nasser have recently received a lot of publicity, but it is the traditional journey along the Nile, which is bordered by famed monuments, that holds pride of place.

Vessels anchor on the bank of the Nile at Luxor, and the journey southward takes three days. The ports of call are Esna, Edfu and Kom Ombo — three sites with magnificent temples that are most easily accessible from the river. Most of the cruises have multi-lingual guides, many have swimming pools, and all provide shaded sun decks and full-course meals.

There is not much Nile traffic between the sites. The journey is quiet and peaceful. Felluccas and flat-bottomed sailing boats transport pottery, grain or limestone northward and local fishermen can be seen casting their nets offshore.

"We had time on the river to relax and think about what we'd seen," said Mahmoud Riad, a tour guide who recently brought his group to the Luxor and Karnak temples on the eastern bank of the Nile, where they saw the columns of the central court of Luxor Temple being restored. The exquisitely-proportioned columns had been undermined by sub-soil water. When excavations were carried out, a whole cache of statues was discovered, now on display at the Luxor Museum.

"One member of the group was an engineer," recalled Mahmoud. "He said that he was only on the cruise to accompany his wife. But when he saw the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, with its forest of mighty columns, and the restoration of the ninth pylon, he was fascinated. He even tried to calculate the number of small uniform decorated blocks from Akhenaten's Sun Temple which had been dismantled and hidden in the pylon's core."

Karnak temple is a huge ancient monument that is not, in fact, a single temple. It is a temple within a

temple, with a shrine within a shrine, where almost all the pharaohs of the New Kingdom recorded their names and deeds.

The "sound and light" performance at Karnak is held in English, French, Arabic and German. It is part-tour, part-spectacle. The tour begins in front of the double row of ram-headed sphinxes, moves through the twin towers of the entrance pylon, across the Great Court, and into the awe-inspiring Hypostyle Hall. The walking tour ends at the Sacred Lake, where tiered seats overlook the whole of the complex. The narration covers the history of the site as well as the feasts and festivals performed in honour of the local gods.

On the western bank of the Nile at Luxor is the City of the Dead, where the valleys of the Kings and Queens are located. The Tomb of Nefertari, the

hall is visible.

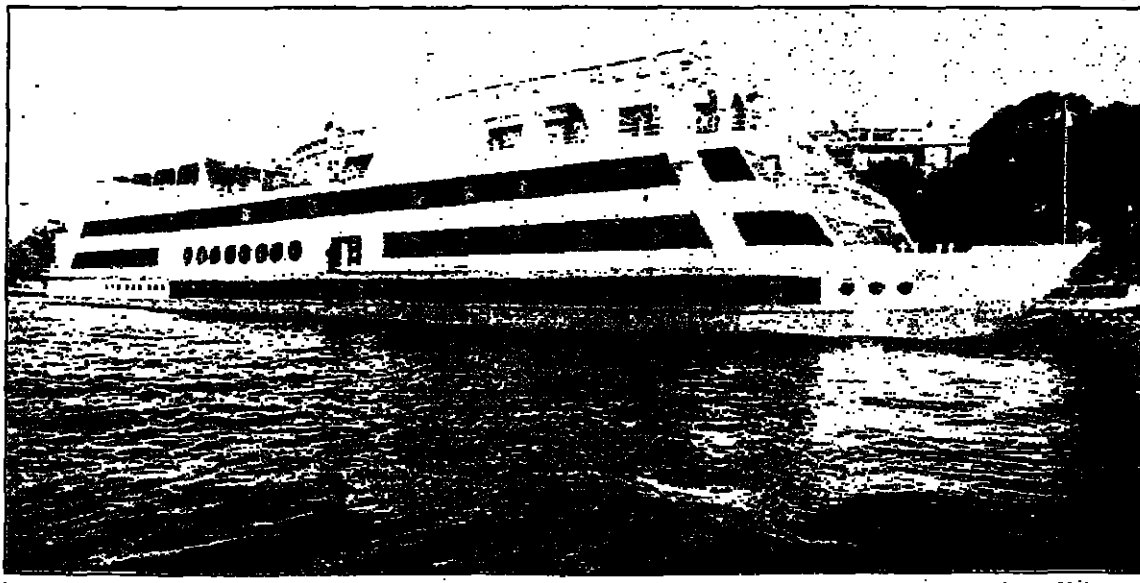
At Edfu, the Graeco-Roman temple dedicated to the hawk-headed Horus is one of the most well-preserved in the whole of Egypt. Its walls, pylons, corridors, halls, ante-chambers and sanctuaries are embellished with reliefs that are considered among the most beautiful in Egypt.

Kom Ombo, too, is noteworthy. It stands at the very edge of the Nile at a point where the river curves, facing an island. The temple there is unique in that it is dedicated to two deities — Horus the hawk, and Sobek the crocodile.

Approaching Aswan, the river becomes studded with islands of granite and dolomite that grow at the river's edge. One of Aswan's chief landmarks is the Qubbet el-Hawa on the western bank of the Nile, which is studded with tombs. On the east bank are the famous granite quarries which have been the main source of granite in Egypt throughout ancient history. There, an unfinished obelisk still lies in the quarry, attached to the bedrock. Had it been completed, it would have weighed some 1,162 tonnes and soared 42 metres high.

"My engineer client relaxed on the boat, and only visited one temple. But when we reached the Aswan High Dam he showed interest again," said Mahmoud. A total of 42,700,000 cubic metres of construction material was used in the rock-filled dam, which measures 3,600 metres long, 114 metres high, and has a base width of 980 metres. "He was most interested in such details," said Mahmoud.

Near the High Dam are three temples of Nubia that were saved and reconstructed. Also saved from the rising waters of the reservoir after the construction of the High Dam is the Temple of Isis, which is accessible to visitors by motorboat or galleon. As a growing rival destination to the Nile, Lake Nasser offers cruises in a picturesque setting, that "might have potential," said Mahmoud, who favours the traditional Nile cruises. "And anyway, the Nile is what people expect when they plan a cruise in Egypt."



Nile cruises are again travelling full capacity

photo: Al-Ahram

beloved wife of Ramses II, is now open to the public, as are two new royal tombs in the "west valley", belonging to the pharaohs Siptah and Aye.

Six recently restored noblemen's tombs are also open to the public. These, and others, are carved into the mountain where the villagers of Qurna also reside. Efforts are being made to remove them to a new settlement and mark the area off as an archaeological zone.

After departing from Luxor, the cruiser stops at three places before Aswan: Esna, Edfu and Kom Ombo. Esna is the site of the Temple of Khnum, a ram-headed deity, which lies partly buried beneath the modern town. Little more than the colonnaded

Viva Italia

EGYPT was one of 100 countries that participated in the Italian Borse di Milan from February 28 to March 3. It was hailed by Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority, as "one of the most important tourist events of the year." Forty Egyptian tourist companies, hotels and tourist villages participated, handicrafts were displayed, and governments in the Red Sea and Sinai had a chance to promote their attractions.

Italy is the second largest exporter of tourists to Egypt, a rank maintained by a four million dollar Egyptian publicity campaign launched in Italy last year.

Learning to dig

THE FIELD-training school at Mit Rahina began another five-week session for over 80 trainee archaeologists of Pharaonic, Graeco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic schools. They will train with eight archaeologists — four Americans, and four Egyptians who trained on excavation sites in New Mexico — and will be equipped to conduct their own excavations using up-to-date techniques. This is an ongoing collaborative endeavour between the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) and the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE).

High on a list

FUNDS are now available for the restoration of monuments. This year, one million pounds have been allocated to Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic monuments. High on the list of restoration priorities are the Al-Maslaha (Hanging) Church in Old Cairo, the Hibis Temple at Kharga, and the Giza Plateau.

Back in focus

THOUGH Middle Egypt has not officially returned to the tourist agenda, it soon might. Every effort is being made to ensure that its most popular sites will be ready for the public. The roads leading to the main monuments at Tel. Al-Amarna, including the area known as Al-Hagg Qandil, are being paved and lighting installed. In the Al-Minya Governorate, Tuna el-Gabal (west of Malawi) and the Tomb of Issora will receive their share of attention.

Sunlit Ramses

NOT all visitors to Abu Simbel can access the famous Temple of Ramses II during the equinox and watch the sun light up the visage of the handsome king in the inner sanctum. But now, a 1,570,000 closed-circuit TV is being installed so that thousands of sightseers, assembled near the entrance, can witness the phenomenon for themselves.

More Americans

STILL unconvinced that Americans, once again, consider Egypt a tourist destination, members of the American Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Tourism will fly to the US next week to promote Egypt in six states. The team is undertaking this effort despite the immense publicity that surrounded Kent Weeks' discovery of the Mausoleum of Ramses II's sons in the Valley of the Kings.

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	324836-324735
Alexandria Offices: Ramli:	4833357-4829778
Gleem:	5845461-5845434
Airport Office:	4218464-4227888-4282837-4281989
Aswan Office:	3154006/112/314
Airport Office:	488307-488588
Assiut Office:	323151-322711-324000-329487
Mansoura Office:	363978-363733
Hurgada Office:	443591/4
Airport Office:	442883-443597
Ismaia Office:	328937-221958-221951/2-328936
Luxor Office:	388588/112/314
Airport Office:	388567/8
Luxor Office Karnak:	382348
Marsa Matruh Office:	934398
Menoufia Office (Shebin El Kham):	233302-233523-233522
New Valley Office:	888941/695
Port Said Office:	224129-222878-228921
Port Said Office Karnak:	238833-239978
Sharra El Sheikh Office:	686314-686489
Airport Office:	686488
Taba Office:	682530010-530011
Direct:	5783628
Tanta Office:	311758/311780
Zakazik Office:	349829-349838/1

offside politics

Sport and politics have become inextricably intertwined in recent years, as conflicts between nations are played out on the sports field, writes Eric Asomugha

How can an activity which pitches different races and nationalities against each other not become politicised? Unfortunately, even in the arena of sport, experience has proved that where nation meets nation, clashes will occur.

At its best, sport can connect people, who might be from completely different cultures, through the language of a shared activity. Competitors unable to understand each other linguistically can comprehend completely the nuances of each others' performance on the field.

This is international sport at its best. But at its worst, sport can be used as a pawn in international power games and petty disputes, or even to promulgate racist theories. On the other hand, it has played its part in excluding apartheid and empowering deprived groups. But all in all, for good or ill, big sporting events provide excellent arenas to make a statement, because that statement will be recorded by the world's media.

The image of the gloved hands of three African American athletes raised in a black power salute at the 1968 Olympics has become an icon of the sixties. And Hitler's 1936 Berlin Olympics provide a classic image of the thirties, orchestrated to prove the superiority of the Aryan race, a theory dramatically debunked by the victory of black American runner Jesse Owens. Sport provided the backdrop, but these events were imbued with a cultural and political significance that far outweighed what happened on the field.

Sports events, particularly the Olympics, continue to be a political battleground, although on a rather more banal level, and one where sport often emerges the loser. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the threat of withdrawal from the Olympics hung over superpower dialogue. Both sides proved their willingness to play this card, and a US-led boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games was followed by a Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles games four years later.

The heightening tension between China and Taiwan over the latter's international recognition is inching its way into sport as well. In February, according to AFP, China threatened to take action should Taiwanese leaders be invited to this summer's Olympics in Atlanta. And Japan's Kyodo news agency quoted China's sports minister, Wu Shaoyu as saying that the situation would worsen if something similar happened in the Olympics as had occurred at the 1994 Asian Games at Hiroshima, when the invitation of the Taiwanese vice-president caused China to threaten a boycott.

Meanwhile, in Africa, two of the continent's most powerful nations have recently become in-

involved in a tit-for-tat battle following South Africa's exclusion of Nigeria from its friendly four-nation soccer cup following the hanging of nine Nigerian human rights activists.

Nigeria then refused to attend a Confederation of African Football (CAF) competition held in South Africa, citing security reasons. This decision left the competition sadly deprived, losses were incurred, and the African football body brought a disciplinary action. Many are of the view that, without the intervention of power brokers and the willingness of nations to separate the game from international squabbles, more problems are likely to arise.

Africa is not the only place where political rivalries are being played out on the football field. Last September FIFA, world soccer's governing body, had to extend the deadline for its decision on whether to award the 2002 World Cup finals to Japan or South Korea; the decision will now be made by 1 June. The two nations have become embroiled in a bitter fight to host the championship, with South Korea invoking Japan's record in World War II and insisting that as a country which has never qualified for the finals, it has no right to play host. Only time will tell if FIFA's delay tactics succeed in calming the tension.

Choosing venues for events has often proved a political minefield for sports' decision-makers. The failure to award the 2000 Olympic Games to China, awarding the 1998 FIFA World Cup finals to France instead of a qualified Morocco, the refusal to allow Nigeria to host the 1995 FIFA World Youth Cup — all these have led to allegations of political favouritism — generally of the north over the south.

In 1970, a minor war broke out between El Salvador and Honduras as a result of the World Cup preliminary matches. Of course this example is extreme in its degree of ludicrousness, but there is little doubt we have come a long way from the Olympic ideal of the best and strongest of all the nations meeting together on the field to compete as one community. It is not our sportsmen and women that have failed. Rather, it is the nation states which, in recent years, have got in the way of allowing sport to fulfill its potential as a peacemaker.

Surely the time has come when action needs to be taken to avoid sport being subsumed in a mire of political differences, power struggles, and competition for prestige on the international scene. What we need today is a conference on sport for world peace, to stress the positive side of sport and minimise its use as a pawn in the games nations play.



CATCH OF THE DAY: Leila Fathalla led her Heliopolis Club team to victory in the 13th International Red Sea Fishing Tournament, reports Inas Mazhar from Hurgada.

Eleven teams, both Egyptian and foreign, took part in the four-day, three-night competition organised by the Hurgada Sheraton marina. The aim was to catch as many kinds of fish: dolphin-fish, sailfish, tuna, Jack Trevally, wahoo, barracuda, amberjack, spotted grouper and bonito. In the event, competitors only managed to catch seven varieties. Fishing was by rod and line, with fishing equipment weighing no more than 80 lbs. All fishing took place in territorial waters of the Red Sea, excluding Ras Mohamed and other nature reserves.

The Heliopolis Club's victory, aboard White Beauty, was a welcome change from the team's experience in three previous tournaments, when the boat suffered from engine failure while out at sea, and had to return to the marina and face disqualification.

"I had to fight to form a fishing team at the Heliopolis Club," commented captain Leila Fathalla. But for her the fight had been worthwhile, and her team had "put our bad luck behind us to become winners. What will make me even more proud is when more women take part in this hobby and participate in competitions," she added.

Second place went to the Alexandria Yachting Club; third place to the Maadi Yachting Club.

Running for a good cause

Under the banner "For the welfare of the community", the Maadi Sporting and Yachting Club, in cooperation with Rotaract, organised a four-kilometre run for charity. Eman Abdel-Moati reports



The Maadi Marathon; running for a good cause

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

The opportunity to run for sheer enjoyment, while at the same time helping the needy, brought a group of runners of all ages together in Maadi for a four-kilometre fun run.

The Maadi Sporting and Yachting Club used to organise an annual six-kilometre run for its members. Last year, Rotaract, the youth section of the International Rotary Club, also based in Maadi, suggested that the event should be opened to all Maadi residents, and that the money raised should be given to charity.

Last Friday the new project came to fruition as people of all ages set off from the starting line for the new Maadi Run. "It went better than we expected," commented Khaled El-Khouli, one of the organisers and head of Rotaract's fund-raising committee. This was the second race which Rotaract has helped organise to raise money for the com-

munity, El-Khouli said. Last year, Rotaract raised LE4,000, which was used to buy medicine for children at the National Cancer Centre. "People come, donate five pounds as an entry fee, they run, they may not win, but in the end they feel they have done something good for themselves, and for their community," commented another of the organisers.

The five-pound entry fee is a small gesture compared to the LE2,000-worth of prizes donated by the race's sponsors. This year's race raised LE3,000, and this, together with other funds Rotaract have raised, will be used to provide equipment for the disabled and for literacy classes.

On the Maadi Club's side, the organisation was undertaken by the younger members, according to Alaa Sadek, director of the club's sporting activities. "The shadow board [composed of club members aged 16-21] organised the run instead of us,"

he said. The race, he added, had demonstrated "the true feeling of sportsmanship".

Ninety able-bodied participants and 26 disabled athletes set off from the starting line at the Maadi Club. The route took them to Victoria College, around the college, all the way to the Autostrad and then back to the Maadi Club.

This was the first time that disabled athletes took part. First across the line in a wheelchair was Mohamed Samir Sawah. "We learned about the race from the federation," he said. "We decided that it would be a good idea to take part, especially as the money raised will be used to provide equipment for other disabled people." Second among the disabled athletes was Ashraf Abu-Zeid; Osama Abdel-Fadil was third. Among the able-bodied competitors, Sameh Khalil was first, followed by Abdel-Daem Mohamed, and Tarek Othman.

Although most of the winners were Maadi Club members, competitors from outside the club seemed to enjoy the race just as much. "Running for a good cause is fulfilling," commented one. Runners as young as 12 years old participated, including Faisal Abu Bakr, first prize winner for this age group. Walid Mustafa came first in the under-16 category. Hussein Azam was first in the under-20 section. Ayman Ibrahim was first under 30, Mohamed Abdel-Razek first under 40 and Mohamed El-Gamal first under 50. Only around 10 women participated. Dina Tarek came first in the under-12 section, Rasha Abdel-Halim won the under-20 category, and Iram Hussein came first in the women's open.

Looking to future fund-raising possibilities, Rotaract is now considering organising an exhibition match between squash champions Ahmed Barada and Omar El-Brollousy, both members of the Maadi Club.

European Union

THE EUROPEAN Commission has flatly rejected a call for sport to be treated as a special case under the terms of the Maastricht Treaty. The case, made last week by Europe's top sports officials, urged the European Union to acknowledge the "specificity" of sport, allowing it to be governed by its own rules and institutions.

Leading the call was the European Football Union (UEFA), which in December saw its authority crushed by the EU's European Court of Justice, in a case brought by Belgian footballer Jean-Marc Bosman. The footballer had complained that transfer fees and UEFA limits on the number of foreign players allowed in a team had damaged his career.

In Frankfurt, the German Football Federation announced last week that all of the country's 36 professional clubs would apply the Bosman ruling from 1 July. The federation made it clear, however, that they will insist German clubs have at least twelve German players under contract.

Soccer

FIFA is considering a suggestion to allow referees who play the advantage rule to change their mind and award a free kick if no advantage materialises. FIFA's rule-making body, the International Football Association Board, is to vote on the idea at its annual meeting in Rio de Janeiro next Saturday.

THIS WEEK witnesses the end of the 15th week of the first round of the National League Championship. Ismaili tops the league by 34 points. Zamalek are in second with 33, followed by Ahli on 32 points. This week, Zamalek defeated Qena 2-0, Ahli drew with Ismaili 1-1, and Itihad and Moqawloon also drew 1-1.

Athletics

THE INTERNATIONAL Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) last week ratified Australian Emma George's 4.28m pole vault as a new women's world outdoor record. George, who set the new record in Perth in December, held the previous record of 4.25m, set in Melbourne a month earlier.

Boxing

HEAVYWEIGHT champion Frank Bruno is expected to give Mike Tyson a tough fight when they meet on 16 March. Tyson beat Bruno in 1989, but despite winning his two fights since his release from prison a year ago after serving a three-year sentence for rape, Tyson has not appeared over-powering.

Bruno holds the World Boxing Council (WBC) crown, while Franz Gotha of South Africa reigns in the International Boxing Federation (IBF) and Bruce Seldon holds the World Boxing Association (WBA) title. Tyson is on course to fight for all three titles if he keeps on winning — although Michael Moorer and Axel Schulz are next in line to meet Bruno.

Cycling

EGYPT'S International Cycling Championship takes place today in south Sinai, with 10 foreign teams and two teams from Egypt taking part. Tarek Guindi, secretary-general of the Egyptian Cycling Federation, said that last year's champions, the Russian team Lada Samara, have their eyes on the gold medal.

Swimming

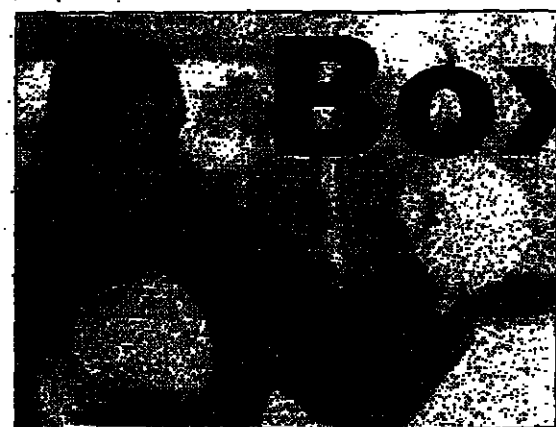
SOUTH Africa holds a new world swimming record. Penny Heyns swam the 100m breaststroke in 1 minute 7.46 seconds, in heats for the national swimming championships, beating the previous record of 1 minute 7.69 seconds, held by Australian Samantha Riley. Heyns has predicted that she could swim even faster in Monday's final.

Compiled by Nashwa Abdel-Tawab

Qabbari Abdel-Karim Salem, 28, one of the best boxers on the national team, came to the sport comparatively late. At 14, he took up handball and weightlifting, but at 16 he decided to follow his eldest brother and try his hand in the boxing ring. His weightlifting experience served him well, and he recalls how he wasn't afraid to fight "because I was used to lifting heavy weights so my body was prepared for it".

Soon after joining Olympic's boxing team he made it to first place in the under-16 Alexandria district championship. As a result he began training seriously, using his teammate, then-world champion Ahmed El-Naggar, as his role model. Olympic's boxing coach, Khamis Mohamed, nicknamed Baba Khamis, soon spotted his talent and began to take a personal interest in the young boxer. With Baba Khamis's moral support and training, he was able to win first place in the national boxing championships in one year.

These achievements led to his selection for the national team in January 1988. In October of the same year, he came second in the under 71kg category at the Military World Championships. In 1989 he was named the first Egyptian, African and Arab boxer and scored



Boxer Qabbari Abdel-Karim Salem

third place in the World Amateur Boxing Championship in Moscow. In 1991 he won first place in the All Africa Games and the Mediterranean Championship. The only boxer chosen to represent Egypt in the Barcelona Olympics of 1992, he failed to make it to the finals, although he won gold medals in the Arab Championships of 1993 and '94. Salem was unlucky in the All Africa Games in Zimbabwe in 1995. Suffering a bad injury in his semifinal fight, he was forced to withdraw from the finals and had to content himself with the

bronze medal. However, he made a speedy recovery and was back on form to take fifth place in the World Championships in Berlin last November. With this competition, his world ranking rose from seventh to fourth, a position which has brought him a lot of satisfaction. "I can't express how happy I am to be the first Egyptian to be ranked fourth in the world in his weight for such a long time", he said. As a result of this achievement, Qabbari Abdel-Karim Salem was the only Egyptian boxer to be nominated by the

Boxing to the top

Abeer Anwar traces the career of boxer Qabbari Abdel-Karim Salem, as he prepares for the road to Atlanta

International Amateur Boxing Federation to take part in the "Best Four" Championship, which will take place in the Olympic facilities in Atlanta, in May. Salem is looking forward to the trip. "I know it won't be an easy competition," he commented, "but I have a challenging spirit and I don't like people to get the better of me, so I'll give it my best shot".

He is currently in training at a closed camp at the Olympic Centre in Maadi, alongside his teammates who will represent Egypt in the forthcoming African Championship from 8-19 March. He prefers to train with others — the motto of the team's former coach, Helmut Claggett, was "Together you achieve more", and it's a maxim Salem likes to stick by. His schedule is rigorous, with training sessions twice a day: one for physical fitness and the other for technique. He also follows a strict food programme to achieve maximum energy without weight gain. It is a highly disciplined life. But Salem believes it is worth the sacrifice. He has his eyes on one prize — a medal in the Atlanta Olympics later this year.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Olga Kouznetzova: The warrior's husband

A simple and grand Russian, she plays the piano, but opens no doors



Photo: Sherif Sobhy

She's a clam. How to make a profile about a clam? A difficult thing.

She seems haunted. First meetings can be deceptive. This one is. She's not haunted, she haunts you. A Russian ghost? After all, they specialise in them. Very nice to be Kouznetzova-haunted: she's benevolent at all times.

One can approach Olga Kouznetzova from many angles: woman; pianist; Russian (very important slant); teacher; ideas-lady for opera singers. And as a human being? She seems to lean to this human side, but there is much of the bird about her, though as she says, she is no dove. She has an avian quality about her: darting, intelligent, speedy on the move and sharp-eyed — and these aspects shine brightly. She appears frail. There are other surfaces. In another age you could say she was jewel-like; in this age: hard-edged. And this is where the mystery begins. A hard-edged what?

Questions flow, and there are few, if any answers. She warns you she will give none. Ask and you will not receive. She has no hang-ups about anything: about feminism, her family or life's awful problems. My man? She's not married. Or, my children. She has none. She seems not at all maternal, though she loves clothes and looks good.

She would like to be a sex symbol and a blonde dream. She is neither. But what she has is allure. She is witty, irreverent, comic and, in a roundabout Russian way, straight. And her talk flows on in her marvellous heavily accented English, as transparent as good Russian borscht. Leave Kouznetzova with her mysteries. She is as cute as a thieving magpie in protecting them. If the surface is so refreshing, why bother her about anything else?

She is inclined to make a lot of other people look dusty. She is well-proportioned. Her persona is assured and firmly anchored. She has an almost Greek arrogance: the warrior's husband. There is nothing of the pushy, liberated woman about her at all. She has bid a long farewell to the macho female lady and there is nothing abstract or delicate about her character. She merely looks delicate, but to what or to whom does she answer? To music. She has reversed the moral position of most pianists. There is nothing earthly about her until she sits at a

piano. And then it all begins. Of the line of life, so beloved to the profile writer, she is contemptuous. She could make it all up, it would have to go on the page some way.

Not important. And she shrugs. But she must have started somewhere. She did a course and it was in Lvov, the capital of the Ukraine. She was born there. The Ukraine has a slight varnish of Poland over it. It is an area of strong personalities, most of whom are musical. Warriors and musicians. The Ukraine has produced Gilels, one of the century's great pianists, violinist David Oistrakh and the supreme pianist Richter.

For Kouznetzova, facts are few and hard to come by. But her father was an army man, who had three children: a boy and two girls, with Olga the last child. The other sister was born in Kamchatka, the place where the tinned crab-meat comes from. Kamchatka and Lvov — Olga laughs, because Asia separated their birth places since the city of the crabs is on the Pacific Coast of the then Soviet Union. The family decided that Olga, when she came (and she came late) would be a musician. It was as simple as that. No wavering. Odd, because the family, though good middle-of-the-road listeners, were not musical at all. Olga would be a pianist. She was bespoken. As it turned out, at three years of age in Lvov, she showed remarkable aptitude for the huge black thing. The piano for babies is a world to itself — acres of it: wood, shine, steel and blackness. Even uprights are morally disturbing. But Olga began her life-time with what she remembers turned out to be a most exalted philosophy — I go, I go, I go.

And, with the Powers' aid, she went. When she was eight years old, the family moved to Odessa, on the Black Sea. On two occasions in her life, Olga's fate sprang up before her. First the presence of her mother. She became aware of her mother's total devotion to the cause of her youngest daughter. It was neither love nor domination, Olga says; it was creation. The Russians create pianists as the English create gardeners — wild, unruly, not Cartesian but growth and design out of chaos. So grew Olga in her mother's care. The mother was critic (the most ruthless), sister, friend and accompanist (she played number two to the plan she mapped out

for her daughter). It all sounds too wonderful to believe. Has Olga invented the mother? No, because, as the mother subject continues, occasionally Olga becomes misty. Mama is no fiction. The mother seems to have known about everything: hands, brains and headaches in the back area, musical analysis and, above all, form. She wanted Olga to be a musician, not a pianist. Form-overview.

And so Olga, armed with these immaculate precepts, moved with her army father to Odessa, to which town he had been posted. Then sprang into her life the second genie of fate: Olga Maslakh. She was the piano pedagogue at the Nezdanova Conservatoire, a celebrated centre, known throughout Russia. Nezdanova had been a great soprano in St Petersburg and Moscow in Tchaikovsky's time. Olga lived her life with legends, learning and growing. What the mother began, the other Olga, Maslakh, continued. Young Kouznetzova began to attract attention. Maslakh was the perfect pedagogue. She was responsible for Olga's education, and above all, she learned form. What does this mean? Kouznetzova does her best to describe to ignore the charm and the flowers at the side but continue to go on to form the shape and the arc of the composition. You play. Architecture is secondary to form, which is absolute for music. Form attracts the great improviser's mind. By it, or in their search for it, they give their ultimate revelation in music. Olga says it's form which detaches Richter, for example, from all his contemporaries. Her gestures grow sculptural in her search to give visual proof of his genius. She says it is this sense of form, not muscular strength, that often separates male from female pianists. Form — she says the males have it.

When she was about 17 years old, she went to Siberia, to Krasnoyarsk near Novosibirsk, a centre for experiment and the then so-called avant-garde in the Soviet Union. Olga went there as a concertmeister to assist in all musical matters. One maestro, Boris Gruzin, gave her great opportunities in concert and stage work. He went later to what is now once again St Petersburg, she to Moscow.

Any problem is no problem to Olga — there are only ups and downs. She must have had a few of

both, but the entrance door into them is shut tight. There seems to be a quality of unsee to her life pattern, not so much in physical coming and going, but in her interior life — the spirit it was once called; now: career drive. Casting off both, she reached a state of go, go, go. In 1990 Ratiba El-Hefni, then director of the newly resurrected Opera House in Cairo, needing a concertmeister for the new house, officially sent for her from Moscow. What did the move mean to Kouznetzova? No comment. She came. And here she now is; has been ever since.

The earth had moved from beneath her feet. She began here as a member of the Soviet Union and now she finds herself a Russian, a plain, but certainly not an ordinary one. What effect has this had upon her? She has been back and forth to her home a number of times, the mother having died while she was here. Again, a smile on the face of the siren and no comment. One thing is obvious; she loves Cairo, has fallen at least in love with it. No grumbles or moans. She only wants work as well as go.

Her performances here in Cairo are many — yet few. She plays a lot, concerts of all kinds, accompanying, enlivening, rehearsing, assisting, advising, and plain hard uphill labour to operatic productions. On few occasions there have been concerts with her friend Inas Abdel-Dayem, the flutist, and classical jazz evenings which she loves and manages well.

And at other times, a concerto, Bach and Tchaikovsky, the big B flat minor no 1. These two performances were astounding. All her hard won piano ideals turned to victories. The Bach was demonic, though she says he was no demon: he was too busy making babies to be demonic. Nevertheless, the performance had a huge rocklike formal appearance and a drive that set the arches of sound bombarding the Small Hall. It was not contained therein. Her Tchaikovsky also thrilled — form again and a special colour of dissembling decadence, historic overdrive, a great formal B flat minor.

And so where is she now? She's waiting — going on and waiting. She does not feel stuck on the reefs of Cairo. She is happy here.

As a pianist, she is instrument prone, her thoughts

are with it but not exclusively. Maybe she should conduct. All instruments are one and the same to her — shapes and sounds, flowers by the way that lead to the eventual revelation.

Olga says the piano, like all music, is moving SOS into new worlds. It may soon be necessary to produce gender identification cards before a pianist can take to the concerto concert hall. Technology is altering music and listeners. Their concentration level is shortening. Bits of Bach and Wagner, like TV nibble pieces, are looming. Men and women performers are being melted down to a formal sexless image. The he/she of the Oscar deity who hands out medals in its/her likeness which is no likeness at all. The only answer to the new negativism is to keep on going. This is what Olga does.

Pianists, Olga thinks, come, give their concerts and go. Who were they? Last night's player has left by air to somewhere else, gone and forgotten. No musical shapes anymore. But Olga is alive and waiting and her step is light. Mama and Maslakh showed the way to at least keeping up with the race of time.

One thing in Cairo aggravates her — lack of publicity for music and musicians. Other cities make a show for their talents. Cairo is so hard on its musical treasures that, to make a living and a name, they have to go to Frankfurt or Berlin, anywhere but home. Nor is it too generous with the applause. Any questions? Olga Kouznetzova is mistress of the assassinating glance: true look and you're dead — so don't ask them.

And profiles? After a long pause she answers: So-so, the problem is that you have to be perfect in them — no faults — and faults are among your best things.

And hers? Greedy? Yes. Lazy? Yes. Materialistic? No, if I was I would not be working in an opera house.

Clothes? Love them. Women pianists? No comment. Men? No comment.

And Olga Kouznetzova? No comment.

Profile by David Blake

Colour is a message!



The German painter Dietrich Stahlmann born on 6/6/1991 in Duisburg/Germany will have an exhibition at the Cairo Opera Art Gallery, 12th - 22nd of March 1996.

Acrylic painting on photographs

Stahlmann says:

"My purpose is not to illustrate, but to seek the elementary and develop it spontaneously from the individual theme, no personification of the human form.

For me colour is a message, light experienced as a miracle.

Lit from without-shining from within. Personal reflexion on each image.

It seems as if the matter fights for the fact.

My art is oriental, it is iconostasis.

The rituals of ancient Egypt were a search for the link between earth and cosmos.

I do admire this!

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Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostis

♦ I really feel quite lucky at having been invited to attend a lunch at the Arab League headquarters downtown. The lunch was hosted by the League Secretary-General Dr Emad Abdel-Meguid, in honour of the visit of the President of the Arab World Institute in Paris, Camille Cabana. It was quite a small lunch, with not more than 14 guests in attendance, including minister of foreign affairs Amr Moussa, and minister of culture Farouk Hosni. There was also a bevy of important personalities, including French ambassador Patrick Leclercq, rector of Cairo University Mufid Shehab, chairman of the Opera Nasser El-Ansari, high-ranking officials of the Arab League and my good friend and colleague, Mural Saadeddin. Abdel-Meguid gave a warm welcome speech in French, to which Cabana gave a lively reply, also in French, in which he outlined some of the institute's future programmes. One such programme is to organise a festival of French films dealing with the Arab world, and a very good idea it is too.

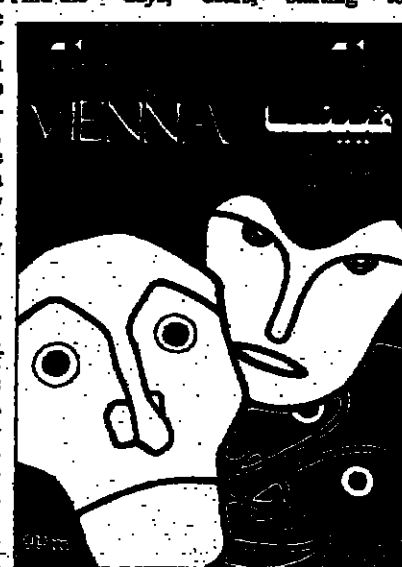
♦ If you're a resident of Heliopolis, as I am, then you must know that it's almost impossible to keep up with everything that goes on in the district. All too often I've complained that at times I find myself unable to keep up with the bustle and bustle of the district that never sleeps. My dear friend Nagla El-Halwagi, herself also aware of these problems, but being more of a charitable soul than myself, has decided to do all the district's residents a favour they will forever be grateful for, recently published the first issue of *Helio Times*, a newsletter which offers its readers community news about Heliopolis and news

shops, streets and latest events, as well as information on health and beauty, the arts, full listings and services available. A real godsend. And the names behind the scene are not unfamiliar either to you or me, readers. *Helio Times* is a publication of *Live Colours*, the fashion magazine which was started a few years ago by my good friend Ahmed Elissa and his lovely wife Rania Foda.

♦ Flowers in the garden, pollen all around, the sound of sneezing in the streets... Spring is in the air, and to welcome in that glorious season, the Cairo Pyramids Movement organised its annual Flower Festival in its Jolie Land gardens recently with the aim of encouraging the protection of the environment. So there it was that I went, welcomed by the hotel's general manager, Alaa Abdel-Hamid and landscaping engineer Gamal Seif, and met with the governor of Giza Abdel-Rehman Shehata. I bought as many indoor and outdoor plants and flower arrangements as my mini-van would hold, and prayed that no one would be able to guess that it was only a matter of hours before they would all be used as food for my pet baby elephant. Oh well, at least I'm protecting the environment in my own way.

♦ The baby elephant was actually a gift. My connections to India go way back, and so it will be with absolute joy that I attend Jewel-India II, an exhibition of Indian jewellery organised by the Em-

bassy of India, in cooperation with the Indian Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation. For three glorious days, dears, starting to-



A taste of Vienna at the Hausger

morow, I'll be rampaging through the Gezira Sheraton Hotel in pure ecstasy. I've always been, after all, one to encourage Egyptian-Indian relations in the fields of trade and commerce. And from the 13th 'til the 17th, I'll be in Alexandria, but no sea air will be entering my lungs. I'll be held up at the Montazah Sheraton buying more good-

ies from the exhibition, which will be opened in Alexandria by its Governor, Ismail Gawsak.

♦ The *Weekly* staff seems to have a natural leaning towards the arts. It's not enough to hear that Mohamed Shebl is, at this very moment, in New York attending a film workshop during which his own film on the controversy surrounding director Youssef Chahine's film *Al-Muhajer*, *The Trial*, will be screened, but now I hear that the same film, and Mohamed's video-interviews with Chahine, as well as his essays on the director's work, will be used during the 49th Locarno Film Festival later this year.

And there's more. *Vienna*, a short story by author Jean Rhy, tells of the city's beauty and transience. The story has recently been developed for the stage by director Sarah Essay and its stars, including my good friends Caroline Khalil and the *Weekly*'s own Pascale Ghazaleh, among others. From what I've seen of Caroline's and Pascale's professional acting abilities — both have starred in plays which received nation-wide acclaim, and judging from Sarah's theatrical background — her mother is none other than the *Weekly*'s theatre critic Nehad Solaita — this is one play I wouldn't even dream of missing.

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